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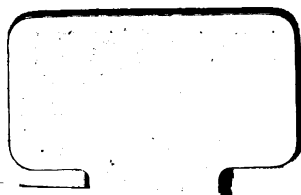
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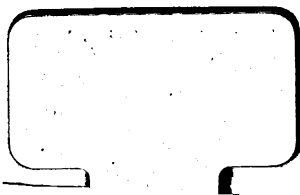


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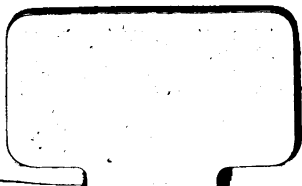


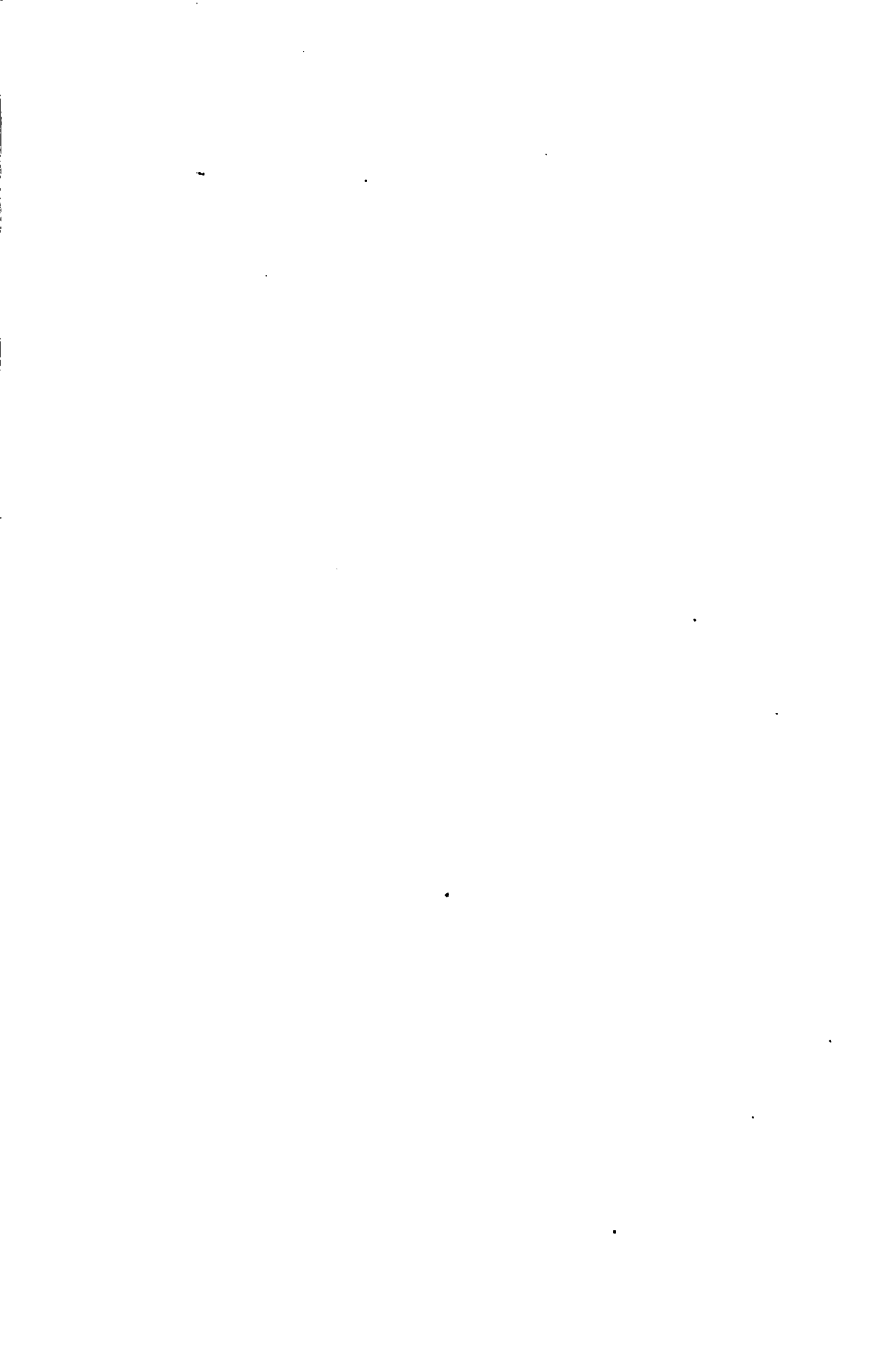
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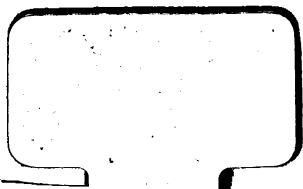
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THE
RAVEN CLUB PAPERS.

EDITED BY
NATHANIEL NUTGALL.

FIRST SERIES.



LONDON:
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1871.

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THE RAVEN CLUB.

EDITORIAL EMBARRASSMENT.

WHEN the Editor of these papers first consented to preside over the few amateur literati who some years ago formed the nucleus of the then nascent Raven Club, he had no idea that he should ever appear before the public in his present capacity.

The Society was merely formed for the purpose of affording a limited number of friends periodical opportunities of meeting together, and rendering to each other such mutual assistance as might be thought desirable towards bringing out their literary productions. At these meetings it was customary for the president to submit any papers

which had previously been entrusted to him, upon which a discussion ensued (the authors being absent, in obedience to a rule of the Club), and it was seldom the members parted without coming to a final decision, either to reject the papers altogether, or to use their influence in finding some channel for their publication.

It was then the duty of the president to convey to the writers, as gracefully as might be, the result of these deliberations, whether favourable or unfavourable, and it was agreed on all hands that there should be no appeal from the judgments thus arrived at in any case.

If, therefore, as it sometimes happened, a member felt himself aggrieved at the verdict of his colleagues, he had but one of two alternatives, either to accept it and pocket the supposed affront, or to indignantly withdraw from the club.

And although it was not often that the latter course was resorted to, yet it was generally found that a dissatisfied member so resigning unconsciously conferred a substantial benefit upon the Society.

For a considerable period matters went on in

this quiet manner, and to all appearance the machinery of the Club seemed to answer its requirements tolerably well.

There had been but little fluctuation in the list of members, and the work to be accomplished rarely required more time for its consideration than came within the limits of the ordinary meetings. But eventually it came to pass that the president was forced by indisposition to relinquish his duties for several months, and on his return he was surprised to find that by some surreptitious means or other a large number of outsiders had been imported into the Society, in order, it was said, to enlarge its scope, and increase its usefulness. As he had always strenuously opposed any material addition of this kind he would have there and then declined to resume his functions as president, but at the earnest request of many friends he consented to do so on condition that no further influx of members should be permitted, except to fill up such vacancies as might arise from withdrawal or other kindred causes.

At this juncture, however, his real embarrassment commenced, for in his absence endless manu-

script had been sent in, but with one or two exceptions none of it had been disposed of. The papers had been carefully indexed, to indicate the rotation in which they were to be considered, but beyond this there was little else done. The consequence was that he found himself literally encompassed on every side with a complete chaos of writing. Some portion of it, perchance, containing the elements of order—here and there, possibly, a stray nugget of pure metal cropping out of an amorphous heap of rubbish, but everywhere material bulk and mental void of all sorts, most irredeemably jumbled and mixed together. A cursory glance at such a monument of human prolixity would have amply satisfied most men, but the unfortunate president was not only expected to read and inwardly digest it, but also to assist the Club in finding means of printing and publishing it. Many and wholly incalculable are the broad acres of paper over which he pored, but beyond a great number of voluntary inkstains and a few involuntary blots he has no recollection of ever meeting with much that took his attention. As for attempting anything like collocation, classification, or arrange-

ment of any kind, it was totally out of the question.

There it stood, a huge papyrus forest of amateur pedantry, with some useful or ornamental shrubs in it, perhaps, but all smothered alike in a dense thicket of verbiage and incoherency of the most impenetrable type.

Whither to turn or how to utilise such diffuse materials was a task that went far beyond the president's limited capacity, and yet before he had returned a month he was assailed on every hand for his alleged inaction and culpable indifference to the merits of this vast accumulation of treasures by which he was surrounded.

Of course such persecution as this was not to be endured, and he at once convened a special meeting with a view of effecting a general clearance, or, at all events, of relieving him from any further responsibility or annoyance in the matter. But on this occasion it was found necessary to relax the rule excluding authors when their own productions were under consideration ; for, as nearly every member had contributed something, it would have been impossible to get a quorum in their absence.

Consequently the meeting was not only very numerous and well attended, but it was in every respect a noisy and uproarious one. Nobody seemed to be pre-occupied with anything like a feasible proposal, but everybody came supplied with an inexhaustible fund of volubility. At last, one man more practical than the rest offered, good-humouredly, to contribute for the entire bulk at ten shillings a hundred-weight, but he was quickly suppressed amid a perfect howl of indignation, although he had the countenance and sympathy of the president, who would have been only too glad to do business with him on such reasonable and liberal terms.

Then it was suggested by a sedulous and industrious contributor that the Society might possibly be constituted as a body, and the writers individually, if a judicious selection could be made by the president, and published from time to time in a small or large volume as he might think best, he himself left untouched both as to what it should contain and the mode of bringing it out. To this proposal some of the more prudent members whose own literary efforts had failed, were inclined to dissent, on the ground of pecuniary risk; but

eventually the resolution was passed by a large majority.

Now, however gratifying the result may have been to the parties most interested, it was by no means so agreeable to the president. In addition to his revisional labour, which was burthensome beyond description, he found himself obliged to combat with obstacles of a very trying character. On one hand he was accused of favouritism and an undue leaning to his own friends, which charge, however natural it may seem, was one entirely without foundation, and on the other hand it was declared that he was utterly devoid of judgment and discrimination in the selection of his materials, and that the book would therefore be a commercial failure.

How far experience may verify the second charge, remains to be seen, but this much, at least, is certain, that of all the invidious positions in which a poor mortal may be placed, that of literary arbitrator is the most extreme. Petty and malignant jealousy in its bitterest form—narrow-minded bickerings, morbid vanity, insatiable yearning for printer's type, unbridled love of publicity, rabid

impatience and lamentable imbecility,—are only a few of the impediments which may clog the even tenor of his way.

Indeed, when the Editor made known his final decision in reference to this little book, and it was found that the first volume would only contain some half dozen of the contributions sent in, there was such a seasonable thinning-out in the Club as to afford some hope that the roll of names might once again return to its original number.

And perhaps one of the vainest of these malcontents was a man who had but recently joined the ranks in the place of a member retiring. He was generally believed to be a German, but from what part of Germany he hailed, or whether he came from that country at all, was a point as unimportant as it was uncertain. In these days of map-changing conquest and aggression the word has acquired a signification so wide that it fails to indicate any particular nationality. Thus it follows that this man might have been a Dane, an Austrian, or even a Frenchman, and still call himself a German. But whatever country he came from he was unquestionably a very clever and versatile

fellow, although, like many other members of the Club, hopelessly prolific. In a very short time after joining, he had sent in essays on every imaginable and unimaginable subject—philosophical, physiological, phrenological, psychological, mythological, hieroglyphical, metaphysical, sceptical, mystical, and lackadaisical.

At first the Editor could see no possible chance of his ever having time to wade through them, but finding the importunity of the author most irksome, he ultimately persuaded himself to undertake the trouble of perusing a few of them, the result of which was the selection of one of the shorter papers for publication. The reader may easily judge, therefore, of his mortification when after all this toil and courteous consideration, he received a note from the author, entirely withdrawing his assistance, simply because he had heard that it was proposed to publish the book anonymously as far as the contributors were concerned. Now the essay itself, although rather learned and profound, was not of the most cheerful description, but the author's name was undoubtedly a very formidable obstacle in the way, and not very likely to become

a household word. The editor never tried to become familiar with it, but such idea as he could gather from an indistinct autograph and occasionally hearing it pronounced, he would imagine might be expressed as follows :—

“Herr Funkenswitzerhausenstein.”

And when the distinguished owner articulated it himself he did so with an intense guttural splash which in no way enhanced its beauty.

But putting aside personalities and regretting the accident which has deprived us of the privilege of presenting the reader with the paper in question, we are glad to be able to give him some hope of meeting with it elsewhere, for, according to the latest rumour, the industrious author was busily engaged translating the whole of his essays into German, in order that the public may have an opportunity of better appreciating them. It appears he is of opinion that they lost much of their force by being written in English, and it is more than likely that the assumption is not without foundation.

In another instance the Editor incurred much displeasure because he declined to insert a contribu-

tion which was entitled a ballad, and which was said would create a "perfect furore" in the literary world, but what the nature of that perfect furore was likely to be, never seemed to strike the writer. There were, in all, some seventy-five verses without one flash of humour to make them worth reading. And besides being twaddle of the most insipid kind they were now and then ludicrously contradictory.

A couple of verses, selected at random, may be taken as an average sample of both these qualities :—

" He vowed he loved her dearly,
Then fetched a bitter sigh ;
He had an eye for the beautiful,
Tho' not a beautiful eye.

" But she sat in sulky silence,
Humming a lively tune,
While all around was darkness,
And brightly shone the *mune*."

And so it went on to the 'end of the seventy-fifth verse.

In vain the Editor pointed out these absurdities. The author could not or would not see them, and

the end of it was that the Society soon saw the last of him and of his poem also.

And, in plain truth, such examples might easily be multiplied *ad infinitum* and *ad nauseam* until there was little space left for anything else—but why bore the reader any further?

If the Editor has been able to snatch one or two readable selections from the dense mass of materials placed at his disposal he has accomplished all he intended.

The repast will be found a very frugal one, no doubt, but if the viands which compose it are at bottom sound and healthy, a temporary change of diet may do the reader no harm. After protracted indulgence in sumptuous fare and French cookery, the modest gridiron chop is often acceptable for its very simplicity sake. So by applying the same rule to literature the Editor would commend this volume to public indulgence, more as a *change* than for any claim it has to elaborate art in serving up the materials here presented. Should this latter consideration be denied it—a contingency which the Editor in no way anticipates—he will at least

be able to make some atonement, if only by promising the public a complete exemption from any further instalment of these papers under his editorship.

SPECULATION.

BEING SOME REMARKS ON THE TURF, THE STOCK
EXCHANGE, PUBLIC COMPANIES (LIMITED),
AND PUBLIC ROBBERY (UNLIMITED).

IF those very estimable, but somewhat fussy, purists who waste so much zeal in trying to make the leopard of evil change its spots, but who seldom attempt to grapple with the animal altogether, would occasionally submit their programmes to the chemical process of logic, analytical and synthetical, it is more than likely they would often escape a great deal of useless labour, and the public would in its turn be spared from the necessity of animadverting on those numerous little exploits of theirs which seem to accomplish no higher object than that of creating popular dissension.

For even granting that the motives of these gentlemen may generally be traced to a sincere desire to reform and elevate mankind it would require a great stretch of generosity to accord to them much praise for the peddling manner in which their work is sought to be done.

They never seem by any chance to dive boldly below the surface and enquire into the *cause* of an evil, as if fearful that stern logic might demonstrate the futility of their projects, but they would go on coquetting with the *effect* for ever and a day. Neither is it quite certain that they would materially change their course of action if it could be clearly proved to them that by one stout blow at the root, a particular tree whose noxious fruit they were bemoaning, would inevitably be destroyed.

They would probably prefer to ignore such a disclosure, and still continue to amuse themselves by lopping off a branch here and another there, perfectly oblivious of the fact that their pruning operations might in reality be benefiting the tree instead of checking its growth. Again, what is perhaps a still worse feature and one productive of

much irritation and many needless tumults, is the apparent inability of these gentlemen to gauge the popular mind. They appear to be blind to the momentous truth that there are certain trees and plants which an omnipotent public *will* grow in spite of all the hostile morality and coercive legislation in the kingdom. It may be a very awkward phase of plebeian stubbornness, and one which earnest reformers may have much reason to deplore, but it is unquestionably too powerful an element to treat with indifference. Indeed, it will not unfrequently appear that the habits which we most deprecate are inseparably connected with our present state of society, and that nothing short of a complete metamorphosis of the existing state of things would effectually cure the evils complained of. Thus it happens, that you may uproot these popular trees in one place, and the public will transplant them in another. You may tell them with a grave face that this seductive hemlock is a poison without any known antidote, and they will reveal to you a dozen useful purposes to which it can be turned. You may seriously point out that this other plant is a dangerous narcotic—a fatal

bella-donna, with tempting shining berries well calculated to allure incautious persons to self-destruction, and they will show you how they may be utilised and taken in small quantities with great advantage, and whether or not, they will soon convince you that they do not mean to be deprived of the right of using a narcotic, if they please. And, although you may ultimately succeed in fencing round such dangerous shrubs with fanciful railings direct from the manufactory at Westminster, they will ruthlessly pull them down and creep through them in the most tantalising and persistent manner.

Hence we repeat, that in dealing with social reforms it is very essential to apply the chemical test paper of logic to them. To investigate and analyse the cause of an evil before coming to the conclusion that it is to be removed by officious meddling with the effect.

It is simply vexatious and cruel to worry any institution, whether it be a blessing or a curse, if the plain fact stares us in the face that it cannot and will not be annihilated.

And notwithstanding that it may greatly shock

our delicate susceptibilities to officially recognise that which we know and feel to be wrong, there are times when it is infinitely better to lay aside our squeamishness, rather than place a barrier in the way, which virtually excludes us from adopting any system of inspection or surveillance whatever.

Above all, if there is any disagreeable and dirty work to be done, let us approach it manfully and with an unyielding force of energy, which, if needs be, can brook and override factious opposition—or, if it seems impossible to sweep away the obstacle altogether, we may at least refrain from making ourselves ridiculous by repeated failures in the endeavour to achieve something beyond our power. It is foolish and perfectly useless to waste our time in brushing a few mud heaps from one side of the street, if we leave a great pool of slush on the other.

And yet, in regard to the Turf, this is precisely what we have been doing for generations past, and are still doing. Every possible variety of moral scavenger has been dabbling in the mire, until the road has become almost impassable, but up to the

present moment we have been unable to meet with a contractor who could remove the nuisance *en bloc*.

And if we can only persuade ourselves to look at the matter dispassionately, without attempting to disguise its real significance under a cloak of false propriety, we shall not be surprised at such a result.

Here, from time immemorial there has existed amongst us a wide-spread spirit of reckless speculation, which if checked in one form has invariably broken out in some other. On every side it is an unmistakable and tangible reality—simple in construction and capable of being examined—but colossal in its influence and operations beyond all conception.

That there must be some great cause for such a mighty passion does not admit of argument, and it appears to us, therefore, that the only question to be decided, is whether after making a reasonable analysis of this, we can fairly hope to eradicate it by any legislative or other interference. If the contrary proves to be the case, then the sooner we abandon our short-sighted efforts and set ourselves

about some more useful method of protecting the public interest the better.

It can surely be no difficult matter for any logical mind to trace the evil to its source, and if he does so in an impartial spirit, we take it for granted he will soon discover this incontrovertible truth, that to destroy the primary cause of speculation of any sort would be tantamount to exterminating the great bulk of mankind. It may be disagreeable enough to realise this fact, but it is impossible to deny it. You may call the desire to get suddenly rich at the expense of somebody else becoming suddenly poor in an inverse ratio, by any name you please, but the ruling motive is the same wherever the transaction takes place. Once desiccate this motive and evaporate the milk and water sentiment, and all the inflated cant by which we are apt to surround palpable vices, and you will find the component elements are the same as in any other kind of speculation, and very much alike in every grade of society.

In any case the difference is only one of degree, and it is of little consequence whither we look for an illustration. The man who affects a virtuous

horror of the Turf, may often be found carrying out the same hazardous principle to a greater extent on the Stock Exchange, or some other arena of legalised gambling, and the only reason which prompts him to avoid the one and espouse the other, is because the second is perhaps considered the more respectable of the two, although morally speaking he does not rank a bit higher than his book-making brethren. And so it is, indeed, with most of us. We are all infected to some extent with the desire to become suddenly rich, and if we could but pass our motives through the common alembic of reason, we should find, on examining the precipitate, that it contained one or more of these fundamental residua :—

- I.—Inborn love of that precedence which wealth can alone ensure.
- II.—Idleness yearning for riches without commensurate labour.
- III.—Brains minus money seeking to prey on money minus brains, and
- IV.—Chance versus chance, with remainder to winner.

If, however, you can show us a community where these seething elements of speculation are not to be found, and where every man is content to confine his efforts to honest irksome labour, we will not hesitate to bid the purist, God speed.

But where these primary conditions do exist, and it is more than probable they will exist universally so long as the world revolves, it is spurious virtue of the most mawkish kind to dissemble and proclaim our abhorrence of an institution which most of us would join instantly if the certainty of a rapid fortune with little trouble could be satisfactorily demonstrated.

In this respect, at all events, we are not a morsel better than our ancestors were, only we lack the blunt candour which they displayed in reference to most of their natural failings, and which, beyond all doubt, has frequently led us into the error of forming a worse comparative estimate of them than they deserved. If they gambled and speculated they did so openly, and never thought of going into hysterics at the mention of a race or lottery, nor of seeking refuge in sham professions and sanctimonious scruples.

We, on the other hand, cling with undying tenacity to as great and even greater sins, but manage, some way or other, to entirely destroy their identity, and give them almost a pleasant appearance.

It is one of the characteristic features of our age to develop a sort of sickly euphemism, which enables us to enjoy all the known vices, and simultaneously affect a purity which is quite imaginary.

And in our dealings with the Turf, especially, we carry this make-believe righteousness to an extent which is perhaps only exceeded by our gross inconsistency. We are never tired of nominally denouncing public betting as a scandal which should be promptly suppressed, and not for the world would we have it supposed that we accorded the slightest outward sympathy to such a growing evil. On the contrary we find means of expressing our indignation by making it an offence against public morals, with heavy penalties superadded thereto ; but this law like every other implies certain obligations in regard to carrying it out, and at this point our complication begins.

We must either attempt to punish the offence it condemns, or evade it ; or if we do neither of these

entirely, we must of necessity partly evade it by inventing some ingenious loophole for the aristocracy to creep through, in order that they at least may not be involved as law breakers. But this dilemma only plunges us into another one, and the end of it is that we find ourselves reduced to the unjust policy of blowing hot and cold at one and the same time.

For while we invent a system of evasion, impunity and subterfuge for the rich, we endeavour to enforce a one-sided, and absurdly inadequate, system of repression against the poor.

And mark you, we subject ourselves to all this needless labour in the full knowledge that ever since Charles the Second revived field sports in England the Turf has been growing apace, until it has now attained gigantic dimensions—that public gambling is an inextinguishable passion largely pervading every section of the community, including many members of the lower and upper Houses of Parliament, and not excluding Royalty itself—that it receives the tacit sanction and active support of the press, which quotes its betting operations, and that the slice which sporting intelligence thus takes

out of our daily papers is really larger than any, or even all its adverse institutions put together—that independently of this the organs wholly devoted to its welfare are more numerous and powerful than the class publications of any other organization in existence—that no human power will ever wipe out the hundred and twenty race-courses from the map of Great Britain, and—that in short the Turf, to all appearance, can never be abolished. Still we are so ludicrously thin-skinned that instead of admitting these grave and undeniable facts in a frank and straightforward manner, and confessing (albeit with becoming contrition) that gambling is a deep-rooted institution amongst us, we choose to go on playing with the leopard's spots under the happy delusion that some day or other our efforts will be crowned with success.

We lack the moral courage which would lead us to acknowledge our inability to destroy the animal, but we cling with childish folly to the little-mindedness which loves to torment and irritate it. And the mere fact that we confine this meddling propensity to the vulgar menagerie, and never dare to practise it in the Royal Zoological Gardens, is but a

small satisfaction, so long as we continue to indulge the propensity at all, for it happens there is a critical public, which zealously watches such freaks of favouritism.

Hence we have found it necessary in regard to Turf matters to seek some shadow of justification for pursuing the two-faced policy which we have indicated.

To punish the poor is easy enough, but if the wealthy will persist in committing the same offences, it is not so easy to claim exemption for them unless we can set up some apology for our inconsistency.

In the present case, we endeavour to do this by starting the shallow pretext that all respectable members of the Turf are only animated with the legitimate desire to improve the breed of the horse, and not to encourage betting proclivities of any sort. That this being the innocent object, they are not responsible for the consequences, and that, in point of fact, they are perfectly indifferent to sporting pursuits and Turf speculations from first to last.

Nor is this all, for it will be found in addition,

that it is sought to carry such pretentious purity a step further, by endeavouring to throw a classical mantle over the Turf, and claiming for it the dignity of an Olympic game. Of course no attentive reader would ever dream of entertaining the comparison for a moment, but it has nevertheless gained some weight in high places, and even judges and eminent authors have been known to adopt it. And we can well understand the temptation there is to resort to such an expedient.

We are all more or less acquainted with susceptible people who stand aghast at the mere mention of a horse race, and who would probably feel deeply offended at anybody enquiring if they had ever been to the Derby. But change the name, and ask them if they were in the habit of witnessing the Epsom Olympics, and it is more than likely they would take a pride in recounting the particulars of their annual visits to those famous classical gatherings. The name would thus be euphemised and have altogether a more respectable ring about it.

Such people as these would gaze with naïve indifference on a nude figure in the Royal Academy

and indignantly fling a Campbell's Act at a far less sensual production in Holywell Street. Decent and consistent propriety might possibly object to both alike, and pass modestly by on the other side ; but they are not in search of decent and consistent propriety, they only want a fashionable excuse for impropriety.

And we sincerely believe it would be hard to ascribe a much higher motive to these sacrilegious gentlemen who would drag the noble athletes of old through the mire of a modern race course.

A very superficial acquaintance with Grecian antiquities would convince most people that the comparison is at best but a flagrant libel on a nation which was distinguished as much for its splendid calisthenic culture as it was for its profound mental development. For whether we look at the Olympic, or Isthmian, or Pythian, or Nemean Games, we shall find the grand object was to improve the physique of *man*, exclusive of any collateral attention which may have been devoted to chariot-horse breeding.

In fact, to quote Dryden's Ovid,

“Here noble youths for mastership did strive,
To box, to run, and steeds and chariots drive ;
The prize was *fame* ; in witness of renown
A beechen garland did the victor crown ;”

And it is that one pregnant word *fame* which constitutes the grand difference. Show us a chance of the Turf putting it in the place of racing cups and stakes and sweepstakes, and there may be a remote hope of the blue riband some day approaching nearer the dignity of the old beechen garland. But until that occurs it is in the highest degree absurd to expect any person in possession of his seven senses, and who has visited a modern Ascot, Epsom, Newmarket or any other race to believe a word about this man and horse improving pretext, or to look upon the purest of these gatherings with anything like the sacred reverence which was felt by the Greeks for their celebrated national festivals.

If there is the slightest room for scepticism on such a point, let anybody begin his scrutiny by contrasting a modern jockey with an Olympic charioteer, and we fancy he will find a good deal of moral and physical handicapping necessary to bring

one up to the standard of the other—and this, notwithstanding the fact that in our pious and highly sensitive England a successful jockey with all his shortcomings may occasionally earn a revenue large enough to provide average stipends for about threescore men in holy orders.

No doubt in regard to the horse it follows as a natural consequence, that competitive racing of any description must, in some measure, tend to improve his breed, especially when large prizes are offered to the swiftest, and a great deal of Turf fame rewards a victory.

Neither will it be denied that to the sporting world we owe the introduction of the very first Arabian stallion by Darley, an event to which all lovers of fleet and greyhound-like steeds must of necessity attach great importance. And besides, apart from this circumstance, we need scarcely say that the mere fact of our being indebted to the same source for a long line of equine wonders from the time of Flying Childers and the famous Eclipse downwards, is of itself sufficient to extort from anybody, whether on the Turf or not, some token of courteous recognition.

But while we candidly confess our gratitude for this modicum of good out of so much evil, it would be simply an excess of credulity to claim for the sporting fraternity that purity of motive which would place the welfare of man and horse first, and betting transactions second. It would be a false deduction with an army of bankrupt patri-cians to attest its erroneousness.

And yet, whatever opinion we may hold as to the folly of gambling in high places, we are not so illogical or so utopian as to suppose that any legislative measure would substantially affect a custom so deeply rooted and widely indulged in, nor would we deem it expedient to urge such interference unless it should transpire that public rights and public convenience were in danger of being infringed or violated. In truth, we should much prefer for honesty's sake to confront the evil as it stands rather than reduce noblemen and gentlemen to the miserable necessity of pleading the broken-winded plea to which we have alluded, and which to our mind so unfairly seeks to saddle a useful animal with the responsibility of all the mischief that is done in its name.

But, unfortunately, these lame apologies which have been put forth for the rich do not shield the middle and lower classes.

It is a fact, no less unjust than it is true, that when we would survey the peccadilloes of the upper ten we invert the telescope and see very little of them, but we seldom give to the other classes of the community the benefit of this charitable appraisalment.

For, although we are accustomed to hear a great deal of turgid and high-flown rant about the undeviating equality of our laws, it is, after all, only surface talk of a very flimsy kind. It is true that we do not print separate acts of parliament for each grade of society, nor do we print those for the Commons on brown paper, and those for the Lords on white satin, but we adopt a medium course, in every respect as objectionable, and only pass laws which are likely to affect the great toiling masses of the people. And a more pointed example of this class legislation can nowhere be found than that affecting the subject now under discussion. Indeed, when we glance at the latest illustration of this policy, we cannot help calling

attention to one or two remarkable features connected with it.

That a bill, which is exclusively directed to the regeneration of the lower orders of Turf Speculators, should in the first instance emanate from the House of Lords seems out of the natural order of things, but when it is taken in conjunction with other circumstances, we think there is a piquant smack of irony about the whole matter, which may well provoke a smile.

In the first place it completely exempts the class to which its promoters belong, by leaving Tattersall's and the various haunts of rich sportsmen unfettered and unmolested, and in the second place it seeks to establish a system of postal espionage, which might have suited France in the days of the Empire, but is utterly repugnant to the feelings of an Englishman. We are aware it has been attempted to explain away this clause, and gloss it over, but we know what use detectives would make of it notwithstanding.

But the droll part of the business is, that while this measure is being concocted, the peers are gravely discussing the propriety of depriving cer-

tain of their colleagues of hereditary legislative rights because they have been ruined on the Turf, not, be it borne in mind, through the instrumentality of small betting agencies, but by means of the privileged gaming clubs which the bill in no way interferes with.

However commendable, therefore, it may be on the part of their lordships to manifest a wish to improve and reform the degenerate Commoners, and however desirable such a februation of the Gentiles may be considered, we would, nevertheless, venture to suggest that it might be found seasonable and useful if they were first to appoint a commission to enquire into the operation of the Act of 1853. It is exceedingly probable, if they did so, that some evidence might be forthcoming, to show how many members of that Upper House had, with perfect impunity, been guilty of more wild and reckless speculation, and done more in their time to demoralize the Turf, than a dozen Gaming House Bills will ever do to redeem it. Nay, to speak the naked truth, is it not a palpable and discreditable reality that the shamefully partial administration of that same law has rather inspired men with a

dogged determination to evade it, than any good it has accomplished towards mitigating the evils which it was intended to cure?

And besides, is it not undeniable that what both measures leave *undone* is infinitely more mischievous than any of the little molehills in the way of reform which they propose to remove?

They do not, for instance, attempt to forbid the gatherings which are the chief hotbeds of gambling. On the contrary, they still leave us free to officially foster them by offering Queen's Plates out of the public exchequer, in order, we presume, that every tax-paying saint in the kingdom may enjoy the felicity of contributing his mite to what he would perhaps designate the most diabolical institution in England.

Well, now, looking dispassionately at the question in all its bearings, does it not strike the reader that, to put it mildly, we are guilty of a great deal of incoherent partiality and undignified bungling.

We must either be painfully simple if we think that by assisting racing meetings we are not at the same time encouraging public betting—or we must be egregiously inconsistent, if, knowing we do so,

we allow the germinating cause to remain, and pass pottering acts of parliament to suppress the natural outcoming of our own folly? But, unhappily, this latter course is substantially the one we pursue, and it will be found we try to doctor most social grievances, whether imaginary or real, in the same unsatisfactory manner.

And we might almost be converted to that placid state of optimism which could regard such things with comparative indifference, if on examination it were found that the law, as we have it, was fairly administered. We should at least get rid of favouritism and hypocrisy, and that would be worth something, but, as we have already hinted, we are dangerously addicted to the invidious practice of using both ends of the telescope in matters affecting different classes of the community.

We seem to forget that even the very lowest dregs of society are entitled to some fair consideration. It may be no injustice to regard them as social pests and moral vermin, but there is a broad principle of humanity which forbids us to torture anything that has life and sensibility. The man who goes gun in hand, and makes a clean sweep of

a lot of rats may allege ample excuse for his conduct, but if, instead of this, he sets traps for a few poor brutes, and having caught them, proceeds to extract their teeth, and then subject them to the agony of a cruel death, he would probably incur the condemnation of his fellows. And it is precisely on this broad principle we would argue in regard to the evils connected with the Turf. Our remarks may be misconstrued, but they are nevertheless innocent of any intention to extenuate or apologise for the continuance of aught amongst us which has a corrupt or injurious tendency.

Still, while we frankly avow so much, and express our entire disapproval of every institution which traffics in chance, without working any good for the public weal, we must, in the name of common sense, insist on having some fair legislation that will apply to every man independently of caste of any sort, if we are to have it at all. As things go it will be found next to useless, and especially so in regard to the Turf, but it becomes positively pernicious when its administration is tainted with a glaring partiality that is utterly offensive to the inhabitants of a free state.

If our already plethoric statute book must needs be clogged with fanciful schemes for the purification of humanity, pray let us assume the virtue of dealing out their questionable benefits equally to peer and peasant. We have tampered too long with the scales of justice, so long, in fact, that the great masses of the people are beginning to consider whether they would not have a better chance if there were no scales at all.

Let anybody, for example, go carefully through the police reports of this present year of grace, and see how far they impress him with magisterial impartiality.

We equip and support a great body of men at a cost which is brought vividly home to every taxpayer. We supply this force with splendid tackle, regardless of expense, and for what? Simply to fish in the waters of obscurity. We endow it with power unlimited to bait and lay nets to catch unwary sinners—a power, in truth, which enables it to *make* cases for the purpose of bringing manufactured offenders to justice, and how is it used, or rather, we should enquire, against whom is it used? Emphatically against the middle and lower classes.

It has become the delight of this mighty force to pounce down with a prodigious excess of energy on helpless little tadpoles, insignificant sticklebacks, and trembling mites of minnows, while the great sharks are permitted to disport themselves in the sunshine of favour and devour whomsoever they may entrap, without fear of Scotland Yard baiting hooks and detective snares for game. Two or three journeymen tailors, for instance, found in a humble tavern with the cabalistic dice-box in their midst, are regarded as a magnificent take in this exquisite travestie of mock virtue and stucco morality, but woe betide him who enters the sacred temple of the Knightsbridge Centaurs. The high priests of the craft meet there, and they will smite him to the earth with the "club" of aristocratic privilege. It matters very little indeed, that they sometimes pursue their calling on the sabbath day, to the horror of church-going people—they are powerful and unapproachable. The Lord's Day Society may go prowling about after muffin men and water-cress women, it may gather an abundant harvest of periwinkle vendors and small news' agents, but

must give Knightsbridge a wide berth. Its officious little insects which have goaded the destitute poor to madness, and sent poverty to jail in the name of religion, would have little chance of stinging this mighty Pegasus of the Turf, if they tried.

And, even at the risk of a little digression, may we not well refer for a moment to these Lord's Day persecutions as another remarkable phase of our one-sided administration of the law. Surely, for a lover of justice, it must be a humiliating reflection to consider that after hunting and worrying to death some scores of hungry martyrs, those odious starvation summonses were instantly stopped when it was sought to apply the Act to a royal fishmonger! And yet there is little doubt that this same person could have well afforded to pay as many five shilling penalties as the magistrate chose to inflict, and not have been much the worse for the outlay.

But alas, how different it was with the victims of the Lord's Day Society. To some of them five shillings was a little fortune, and so they were scandalously dragged away from their children, and their homes, to herd with a prison full of common

felons, and jail birds. And this for striving to earn a mouthful of bread which we should have had to supply them with from the poor-rates, had they not preferred humble industry to idle pauperism. Is the task of trudging endless miles with irksome loads of plebeian merchandise so pleasant that poor wretches do it for the purpose of breaking the law? or is it not stern necessity and hungry little ones at home that prompt them to go on their weary errands, while we are comfortably indulging in our afternoon siesta? Are our local taxes so light that we can afford to put a wet blanket on every man who seeks the privilege of living by the sweat of his brow, or what is it that has led us into one of the most deplorable exhibitions of official partiality which has ever brought ridicule on the dignity of the law? Great God, it seems hard to conceive such things possible in the present advanced state of human intelligence! It is perfectly maddening to realise what a lot of pre-eminent quiddlers we are. Never was there a people so imposingly great for the absolute magnitude of its littleness as this commonwealth of ours! Champion Tinkers of surface morality, such as no other civilised nation could

supposing we could remove the present excuses for public gambling, human ingenuity would not be long in discovering other fields for the indulgence of the habit. Witness the gigantic law-case now pending, where we find the wild passion has dared to desecrate the sanctum sanctorum of justice, and the probable verdict is vaguely foreshadowed in betting quotations. Also, that curious little revelation where it appeared that joint stock enterprise had likewise had its innings. In truth, are there not hundreds of channels in which men may gratify the propensity if they are so inclined ?

We have all heard how, at White's, thousands were once hazarded on a race between a couple of rain drops trickling down the window, and of the numberless other devices which have been resorted to in this and other countries, for the purpose of winning and losing money. It is of little consequence whether it be by cards or roulette, chicken hazard or billiards, the principle and result are the same.

So in regard to public betting ; for if we close up gaming-houses the work transacted by them will be done clandestinely, and the only alternative

left us, is to decide whether the latter, without official supervision at all, is not really a greater evil than the former would be under well-organised registration and inspection.

At any rate, do not let us stand blinking and rubbing our eyes, as if we failed to recognise the fact that Turf speculations are a gigantic and powerful reality amongst us.

To strain at the gnats of our ancestors and look with silent horror on their insignificant lotteries, is worthy of us ; but if we must needs swallow the modern camel at Hyde Park Corner, let us do so with a good grace, and cease to take our paltry revenge on the small insects which are certain to be found buzzing about such a splendid and imposing animal.

Meanwhile, if we can see our way clear to divert this great tide of speculation into more useful channels, it is obviously incumbent upon us to use every legal and feasible means at our disposal to promote such a desirable consummation. Doubtless one very important step towards it, would be to afford investors with moderate expectations some protection against fraud, but so little have

they hitherto enjoyed, that it is by no means certain which is the more mischievous and dangerous to the public interest—*legalised* speculations, or *illegal* Turf speculations.

Looking at the history of the last few years, we are very much inclined to believe that we should be rendering the uninitiated reader infinitely more service by entering a timely caveat against the first, and leaving the second to his common sense.

And we say this not without some warrant, because everybody of ordinary capacity must know that in mixing himself up with sporting operations he is at best playing with a fire that may sooner or later burn his fingers, and this knowledge alone, one would think, should inspire in him a certain degree of caution against venturing out of depth.

Again, it is equally patent and well known that no legal liability attaches to Turf obligations, so that people who indulge in betting transactions are conscious that however fortunate they may be in winning, there is no statutory remedy for them in case of repudiation by defaulters. But it is totally different in *legalised* speculation. For while it retains all the conspicuous elements of

gambling in its wildest and most reckless aspects, it also claims the important privilege of issuing its writ of summons to enforce its rights. The Turf must be content with an appeal to honour, but legalised speculation is further empowered to send forth its ominous greeting in the name of Victoria by the grace of God.

And still if we impartially examine the operations of both enterprises, we shall discover very little to justify the distinction. Those persons who are acquainted with the Stock Exchange, for example, need not be told that precisely the same spirit pervades all its speculative operations as may be found on the Turf and elsewhere. The "bull" puts his money on certain shares in the hope that propitious but unforeseen circumstances over which he has no control may arise to send up the price of the "horse" he has backed. The "bear," on the contrary, wants to send down the price, and acts accordingly. He has, perhaps, been backing a horse too freely, and wants to hedge a little, (this term having in fact been recently used by a Financial paper); but both bull and bear are the counterparts of the backers and layers of the

Turf under other names. Again, the "stag," or outsider, is as fully represented on the Race Course as he is in the vicinity of the Stock Exchange.

Both institutions, too, have their daily quotations, and it would be difficult to say which commands the greater share of public attention. Both, moreover, have their slang phrases, and it would fairly puzzle us to trace any substantial difference between the chance operations of "contango" and "backwardization" on the Stock Exchange, and the uncertainties connected with "plunging" and "bookmaking" on the Turf.

It is true, however, that the Stock Exchange does perform many other functions which are useful and necessary, and which cannot be claimed for the Turf, unless, indeed, the horse improvement theory can be urged as a set-off. But then we have little concern with this part of the business, for to buy and sell on commission in a straightforward manner involves no more speculation than the transactions of an ordinary trader, and it is merely a work of supererogation to add that there are men engaged in this particular branch, who are quite as much entitled to respect as any of their

brethren occupied in other walks of commercial industry.

But there is still another important section of legalised speculation, which, although it has been aided in many of its worst efforts by members of the Stock Exchange, cannot in fairness be coupled with that institution, more especially since certain rules have been enforced, with a view of testing the honesty of schemes seeking the advantages which necessarily accrue from official quotation. And here it is perhaps only bare justice to say that in undertaking this latter duty the Stock Exchange has scored a point in its favour, and manifested a degree of solicitude for the public welfare, which was completely overlooked by parliament when it legalised one of the most flagrant and unprincipled systems of speculation that ever disgraced the annals of a trading community. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to affirm that modern company-mongering has effected more misery and ruin than the Turf and the worst part of the Stock Exchange combined.

It is altogether one of the most startling instances of what unspeakable mischief may be

wrought by the best intentioned measure when it seeks to afford legal sanction to that which it neither investigates nor adequately punishes in case of fraud.

You may search the pages of history, and we will promise you that there will be found no approximate parallel, where so much dishonesty and deception have been practised, and so much poverty and destitution scattered abroad, as may be brought home to this one branch of legalised speculation.

For, let it not be forgotten, that the Special Acts under which this wholesale peculation has flourished were ostensibly put forth to *protect* investors, and the most prominent feature of one of them was to *limit* their liability. That is to say, when once in the spider's net you were allowed to go free on payment of the full penalty of your folly—but there was no limit or barrier worth the name placed in the way of the spider-scoundrel who enticed you into the snare.

The consequences have therefore been such as we repeat there is no parallel for in past or modern times, for although we may find occasional out-

bursts of speculative frenzy, they were generally as transient as they were enthusiastic, and more than once ended in the punishment of the ringleaders. But in each of these phases they differed widely from the mania which has been desolating so many homes since the birth of the Joint Stock Acts in 1856. Even the South Sea Bubble of a century and a half ago cannot be regarded as an analogous case. For, however wildly people may have plunged into that wicked scheme, and whatever may have been the consequent misery that ensued, there was about it at least two redeeming points—it survived only a few months, and means were taken for the punishment of the directors in the year following, although they did allow the Prince of Wales to back out with the handsome booty of £40,000.

Again, if we come down to more recent times, and glance at the great railway mania, when Hudson was crowned king, we are bound in common justice to ascribe to it some ultimate advantage to the public, for it opened up communication and developed the resources of trade, to say nothing of the immense facilities it offered to travellers. But

how much good can we trace to the joint stock operations of the last fifteen years? Is not the retrospect one of the most dismal that moralist ever surveyed? To talk about cobbling up the mischief of the Turf when all this legalised swindling has been spreading its destroying gangrene in every town and hamlet of the three kingdoms is a wanton insult to honest men.

For without endeavouring to palliate the folly of our sporting brethren we may surely grant them this much, that the honesty of recognised members of the Turf is proverbial—so proverbial in point of fact, that we have on record cases of voluntary probity which are completely astounding. We should like to hear of a Director who would sacrifice £70,000 to save his honour, he being fully conscious at the time that no legal liability attached to him. But if we go back some twenty years, to the Betting List days, we may fall across a certain Turf leviathan who did pay such a sum across a tavern-bar in preference to incurring the disgrace of repudiation. And it is not a little curious to note by the way, that this stupendous feat of spontaneous honesty set our legislators to work on the Gaming

Act of 1853, whereas all the fraudulent villany which originated with the Joint Stock Acts has been allowed to pass unnoticed.

And further, it may be freely acknowledged in favour of the wildest speculators on the Stock Exchange, that absence of prompt settlements would be a fatal blow to further business.

But in this public company fever we look in vain for one element of permanent good to the community. Everywhere the reverse stares us in the face, and it would be a long life's work to estimate the almost inconceivable ruin, the fathomless misery and privation, the happy prospects blighted, the premature deaths, and fearful list of catastrophe which have been wrought in its name. That such fatal legislation should have remained unmolested all this time, and still be substantially unaltered and unrepealed, is to our thinking one of the most grave instances of official indifference to public calamity which can be found in the history of any country.

One would have imagined that the terrible revelations which followed the hideous Black Friday in May, 1866, would have moved the most

sluggish parliament to action. Yet here was the spectacle of all England speechless and paralysed with impending disaster, which was destined to destroy and break up hundreds of happy homes—England with a huge pall of domestic bankruptcy and ruin hanging over it—and England's legislators adopting no steps to undo, if possible, the sad work to which they had so largely contributed, or even making any attempt to avert future misfortune of a similar character.

If we consider it right, in the public interest, to impose restrictions on dangerous trades because there are fools amongst us who are deficient in ordinary prudence, surely it would be equally right to offer some such protection to the victims of reckless speculation. But no, we prefer to accord free-trade in its widest sense to one, and to fetter the other with all kinds of obligations. Any scheming scoundrel may therefore blast the happiness of hundreds of his fellow-creatures, and lead them to destruction by deception and fraud, but the tradesman who sells a single dose of poison is liable to heavy penalties. The mischief which may be done in one case is incalculable, while, in the

other, it would in all probability be scarcely appreciable.

But so the law stands, and until we have another Black Friday or a social earthquake, there seems little chance of its being altered. We need, then, offer no apology to the reader if we attempt to mitigate its pernicious tendency by pointing out some of the characteristic features of the enterprise which it virtually sanctions and encourages.

For, inasmuch as it is quite certain that the present abundance of money will be the means of drawing out all sorts of companies, many of which have been previously pigeon-holed as hopeless, until the Bank rate should be at its lowest ebb, it becomes the more essential that persons who are not already acquainted with the subject by painful experience should be put on their guard. The records of the Court of Chancery are crowded with terrible warnings, but the difficulty of consulting these renders them practically useless to the general run of investors. We shall therefore endeavour to select for our purpose, a case which may be taken as an average sample of the mode in

which this legalised speculation is sometimes carried out.

Of course, in doing this we shall be compelled to resort to the fictional form, but we may confidently appeal to the noble army of contributories in Great Britain to say whether we are romancing or whether indeed the grim reality can ever be adequately portrayed by the most graphic pen.

At the very outset, perhaps, we cannot do better than take a cursory glance at the Companies Act of 1862, which has, after all, been the principal offender. Then we may pause a moment to make a few general remarks, after which we will conclude with the history of an undertaking which was successfully formed under legal protection, and as successfully wound up under the same favourable auspices.

As the preamble of the Act stands, it somewhat feebly indicates the original intentions of its framers, but subsequent history having proved these to be entirely fallacious, it may be well to alter it so as to embody the objects which it has accomplished.

Adopting this view, therefore, the preamble would read as follows :—

“Whereas it is expedient that the laws relating
“to reckless trading and wild speculation should be
“so amended as to afford facilities to all persons
“anxious to increase their incomes by levying a
“tax on the gullibility of the nation, without being
“amenable to the inconvenience of existing criminal
“laws. And whereas there is a large and fast
“increasing class of persons amongst us, who,
“although possessed of great abilities and a deep-
“seated repugnance to work in equal proportions,
“are nevertheless without any visible means of
“subsistence, and it is desirable that some provision
“should be made for their immediate relief. And
“whereas there is an equally numerous class of
“persons amongst us who having been born with
“cumbrous titles, find their incomes totally inade-
“quate to support their social status, and it is
“expedient that some provision should be made
“for them which shall screen them from the degra-
“dation of labour. And whereas there are various
“ambitious city shopkeepers amongst us, who
“having attained to the dignity of municipal

“honours, are desirous of increasing their incomes
“by having a hand in a dozen other shops besides
“their own, but without the sacrifice of any labour
“in looking after their management. And whereas
“there is an influential body of capitalists anxious
“to solve the problem, that fifty per cent. is con-
“sonant with perfect security of investment. And
“whereas there is an innumerable host of credulous
“but frugal people, who after toiling all their lives
“have managed to save a modest competency to
“meet the contingencies of declining years, and it is
“expedient that they should be relieved of these
“burdens with all possible speed. And whereas
“every term brings forth an alarming accession of
“talent to the Bar, and the Law List generally,
“which being out of all proportion to the actual
“requirements of the community, renders it essen-
“tial that some provision should be made for
“them by passing an Act that will create as
“much litigation as possible: Be it therefore
“enacted, &c.”

Now, whatever interested speculators may say to the contrary, we affirm, with that confidence which actual events can alone justify, that had the Act

been sent forth to the world with every clause of this imaginary preamble inserted in it, the result would have amply justified such a deviation from the usual course.

It would have been merely foreshadowing the abuses which commenced with the Royal sanction, and which have been continued up to the present time with varying success.

But how far the multifarious provisions which follow the preamble have assisted in the development of the objects we have set forth, we must gather as we go along. Most of the clauses have been practically inoperative, and if the same could be said of all of them, it would have saved the public an enormous amount of misery, and relieved us from the trouble of referring to them in this paper.

But independently of the Act altogether, there are certain points worthy of consideration in respect to the many undertakings which we are asked to support, and which points, on being duly weighed, should be sufficient to deter us from incurring any liability, until we had made the most searching scrutiny, and satisfied ourselves that the *bona fides*

were such as to ensure an average chance of success from a business point of view.

No Act of Parliament will ever convert a rotten concern into a sound one, and until we investigate the intrinsic merits of a scheme it is folly to embark our capital on the mere possibility of reaping some advantage from it.

As a starting-point, then, we would say to all intending investors that it may be laid down as a pretty safe rule that no private individual is likely to offer to the public, any business which is worth the keeping—or, if it should happen that a man has a genuine concern which he wants to dispose of, it will generally be found that he offers it to the public for the purpose of getting an extravagant good-will which no private trader would ever dream of giving, and to this unfavourable condition must be added all the expenses of promotion on the one hand, and the probability of all personal interest in the future welfare of the scheme ceasing on the other hand. There are certainly a few companies formed on this principle, which have paid a fair dividend, for it must be remembered, that a private trader who turns over his capital several times a

year, might get double or treble the market price of his good-will and still return a dividend which would satisfy the public, assuming the trade was not materially diminished on its becoming a joint stock company. But although a few such undertakings have succeeded, the failures are out of all proportion, and their name is legion. For it has not unfrequently been discovered that where a large purchase-money has been paid for a business, the vendor has been on the verge of insolvency, and that the shareholders have not only received no consideration for the purchase-money, but have been likewise saddled with fearful responsibilities which had been accumulating for years. A famous discounting firm, and several banks might be cited as notable instances of this kind of ingenuous trading.

And, as a second rule, it may be taken for granted that where a company is promoted for the purpose of developing something which has not been tried at all, that that something is either too risky to tempt private capitalists, or too large to be within their scope. In the first case the less an investor has to do with it the better, and in the second

case the more he investigates the undertaking the more likely is he to back out of it. And we will venture to add that the majority of the schemes which would come under this classification are put forth more with a view to make a profit out of the promotion, than to accomplish any permanent good.

And as a third and last rule we may propound as an absolute certainty, that where a set of men unite for the purpose of getting up a company to develop something which never did exist, and in all human probability never will, the only object is to bleed the shareholders until their liability is exhausted, and then start a fresh undertaking with the same honest purpose.

And paradoxical as this third rule may at first sight appear, it applies with more or less force to a vast number of companies which have never got beyond that happy state wherein their functions have been "limited" to paying the promotion money, the secretary's salary, the office rent and furniture, the directors' fees, the outsiders' demands for sundry goods supplied to the useful officers, and the costs of winding up voluntarily, or in chancery.

Believing this to be the case, therefore, we will

at once proceed to lay before the reader an average specimen of such an undertaking as illustrated in the history of

THE PLUTONIC SULPHUR ORE
COMPANY (LIMITED).

We will suppose then that seven poverty-stricken and utterly threadbare individuals are assembled together in solemn conclave—for no lesser combination can legally commit a fraud in England. They are all talented men in search of a great idea, and are mutually convinced that the world has neglected and ill-used them, so, by an ingenious parity of reasoning, they are unanimous in thinking that there can be no great harm in their ill-using the world by way of revenge. There is a difficulty in the way, however, for in spite of their acknowledged abilities and virtues, they find their aggregate capital will not accomplish much, unless they can manage to inveigle some extraneous pecuniary assistance into the proposed undertaking. This obstacle will naturally occasion some discussion, the end of which will perhaps reveal the fact that by clubbing together, a sufficient sum may be raised to purchase a copy of the Companies Act, and to

insert an advertisement in a daily newspaper. On this somewhat dubious point being disposed of, the members will be in high glee, for although such a beginning may seem very humble to most people, it will generally be found to be fuel enough to fire the ambition of gentlemen seeking to form a company under difficulties.

The next thing to be settled is the form of the advertisement, and the leading spirit forthwith seizes a pen and proceeds to draw up a catching intimation, which will most likely bring a hundred offers from as many unprincipled writers. This document will probably be framed as follows, and with some slight alteration may have been noticed by the reader in his daily paper ;—

“Secretary required to a company. Salary £900, and more valuable perquisites. Hours from twelve to three. Vacation six weeks. £100 required towards preliminary expenses, on approved personal security. Enclose directed stamped envelope to J. S., Universal Newsrooms.”

Of course, such a tempting bait soon lands a secretary with a hundred pounds, for anything like qualification is never mooted in selecting a man to

look after the interests of shareholders. It is just possible that in the generality of cases secretaries may be expected to read and write, because the office seems to imply as much, but even in companies of very high standing the educational test is seldom insisted upon to any great extent.

Having, then, obtained temporary assistance, some attention must be devoted to the name and object of the undertaking, for it is necessary to put forth a prospectus and prepare to register a memorandum of association. And in discussing this question, the main point to be borne in mind is, what is most likely to tempt unwary investors without wasting a moment's thought on its feasibility, its probable stability, or its ultimate possibility. Naturally enough opinions were divided on this important subject, and it was a long time before the whole of the subscribing members were agreed. One of the number, more original than the rest, believed that if they could induce an enterprising bed of oysters to spat somewhere in the vicinity of London Bridge, or the Custom House, or the West India Docks, or Thames Tunnel, their fortune would be made, for then they would be able to pre-

sent this great Metropolis with real natives, on which a prodigious profit might be realised. Another gentleman urged, by way of amendment, and in vulgar, but emphatic language, that if they could induce the public to believe that oysters would be such d——d fools as to spat in any of those dirty places, it would be quite sufficient for their purpose, but eventually the project was abandoned, partly in deference to the well known wisdom of the bivalve, and partly in graceful recognition of human intelligence. Then, of course, were mentioned a variety of schemes, comprising financial associations, and loan offices, bleaching establishments, and blacking manufactories, oil seed mills, and cattle plague associations, jute factories and cotton mills, tontine and plate glass insurances, and, in short, every possible ramification of commercial industry. Not, be it understood, that these seven threadbare gentlemen contemplated entering into any of these multifarious undertakings, but they simply wanted a name for the head of a prospectus which should appear sufficiently attractive to induce the public to subscribe. On this point, at any rate, there was perfect unanimity, but the meeting was greatly concerned as to

what the title of the scheme should be. Nearly every member had a pet project of his own, and so a good deal of time was necessarily consumed in desultory discussion, until there seemed but little chance of coming to any agreement in the matter. Just on the eve of adjournment, however, a hitherto silent member rose suddenly to his feet. He had evidently discovered the philosopher's stone, and assumed all that importance which clings to a man who is conscious of having worked out a moot problem, while his fellows have been cackling about indefinite nothings.

"My dear colleagues and brother workers," he said affectionately, "there is only one way that occurs to me of overcoming the difficulty which threatens to retard our progress, and that is by directing our attention to the great Mining world, with which I may fairly claim to have some acquaintance. If we were to entertain any of the schemes which have been so fully discussed, some unreasonable shareholder might possibly expect us to engage in a trade, of which we are absolutely ignorant, and it seems to me we should be unable to offer any plausible excuse for not doing so. Besides, as we intend to

pocket a large sum for purchase money, it would be obviously indiscreet to submit anything in return which might court investigation. It would be needlessly trammelling ourselves with complication, which it is the easiest thing in the world to avoid. For, by having recourse to a mine, we need not have the slightest fear of molestation, particularly if we fix the locality in some remote and out of the way place, where even the most rabid curiosity would never be likely to penetrate. In such a case, moreover, we need not go to any expense, and we may sell the undertaking at the best price we can get for it. Indeed, all that we should have to do would be to get a Mining Engineer's report and a few samples of ore. The first, I think, I might obtain from a gentleman who has had ample experience in writing reports to order, and the second could of course be easily obtained in the market. And, what is still more important, we could always silence any obtrusive shareholder by assuring him that our engineer had just sent up a fresh lot of samples, and written to say that the boring in different parts of the estate was proceeding satisfactorily. It is very seldom indeed that people are so grasping, as

to expect anything more than samples from a mine which they imagine is in course of development. And, even as a last resource, we could always get our engineer to report that some unforeseen 'fault' had manifested itself, but that strenuous efforts were being made to overcome the obstacle."

"Most excellent suggestions, every one of them," broke in the author of the oyster bed amendment; "but wouldn't it be much safer to choose some locality that we know to be visionary, only put it in such a form as the public will be sure to swallow it?"

"Very well," continued the other speaker, not in the least disconcerted, "there can be no objection to doing that if we should think it more desirable. Experience has proved that it is no detriment to the success of a scheme that the object stated in the memorandum of Association is quite imaginary. We know that in many cases such is really the fact, and there is no reason why our enterprise should be an exception."

"But how are we to come to something practical?" enquired another member. "It will at least require a good deal of ingenuity to frame a taking prospectus, and who is to do it?"

"As far as that goes," said the advocate of the mining project, "I will undertake to prepare the document on the basis which has been proposed. I can easily have it ready by to-morrow, and I will fill in some names of directors, who never decline to associate themselves with anything that has an adequate consideration attached to it. I will also call on my way home upon some solicitors, who will, no doubt, help us, and who may perhaps be induced to find the money to register the company."

"And having, for the present, disposed of these important points," said another member, "is it not time that we should begin to consider the question of capital?"

He was perfectly innocent of the fact that it did not matter much what the amount was.

"Well, in reference to that point," replied the previous speaker, "I should venture to suggest that the larger the capital is, the better. We are more likely to command attention by putting extensive figures at the head of the prospectus than not. And you will perceive the Act offers us every encouragement to start big concerns, for it charges no more for twenty millions than it does for a

paltry half million. But if you will leave the matter to me, I will to-morrow submit a draft to you which I think will answer every purpose."

And so, at length, the meeting broke up with that intention, and the seven penniless and thread-bare members again sought the obscurity of their unpaid lodgings, each one rejoicing in his heart that he might soon be able to snap his fingers at the rude importunity of Paul by drawing upon the surplus resources of Peter.

No wonder, then, that they all came up to time, at the adjourned meeting on the following day, and we will leave the reader to imagine if he can, with what delight and profound admiration they listened to the perusal of the following prospectus. It is, of course, slightly changed in some of the names, for it is a dangerous thing in these euphemistic days to call a scamp a scamp. You might safely assert, for example, that a well-known man had been interested in the promotion of half-a-dozen schemes, and received vast sums therefrom, and that all of such schemes had not only miserably failed in their ostensible objects, but had likewise ended in ruining an incalculable number of people.

—and that, we apprehend, would not constitute a technical libel, if the facts bore out the allegation. But, once be indiscreet enough to say that the same individual had, in doing all this, been guilty of gross dishonesty, and the charge would affect so many respectable people who had sinned in the same way, that you would be instantly crushed by the law of libel, which is a mortal enemy to the exposure of rascality.

But with this reservation, we are enabled to present the prospectus unaltered, and as finally adopted by the original members. Although for the purpose of advertising it was of course very materially condensed, as it would be an extremely hazardous undertaking to insert such a lengthy document in all the principal papers without the absolute certainty of a tolerably large number of shares being taken up.

Sometimes, however, an advertising agent may be induced to incur the risk, but such confiding men are becoming daily less numerous. How, therefore, the seven impecunious promoters of the present company overcame the difficulty, will appear hereafter.

The Plutonic Sulphur Ore Company (Limited)

Capital £2,000,000 in 200,000 shares of £10 each.

£2 per share payable on application, and £2 on allotment. No call to exceed £2, and at intervals of not less than 3 months.

Directors :

Lord Harry Nyx	-	Lucifer Lodge (Chairman).
The Hon. Mr. Blayzes	-	Late Consul Terra del Fuego.
Capt. L. Fyre, M.P.	-	Benighted Service Club.
Alderman Turtle	-	Master Warden of the Ancient Guild of Swineherds.
I. Cheetham, Esq.	-	Brymstone Villa, Chiselwurst.
and		
U. Swindelem, Esq.	-	Furness House, Helstone.

(With power to add to their number, but not exceeding the number of shareholders.)

Bankers :

The London and Hades Amalgamated Bank.

Solicitors :

Messrs. Vultcher, Kormorant and Pyke,
Indenture Alley, Devil's Commons.

Brokers :

Messrs. Dodger and Settle.

Auditors :

Messrs. Check, Stamp and Ballence.

Mining Engineer :

Capt. Davy Jones. His-locker.

Secretary :

Frank Kneedy, Esq.

Temporary Offices :

(Permanent ones not being required)
2, Wheedlum Buildings, Frawd Street, E. C.

P R O S P E C T U S .

“FOR many years the large and important Alkali
“and Chemical Works of this country, have consumed vast quantities of sulphur ore and iron
“pyrites, and have in some measure been dependent
“on the fluctuating supplies of Spain and Portugal,
“besides having, in many instances, to pay heavy
“freights and other burdensome charges. And,
“although the numerous products which contain
“more or less of these useful minerals are in constant demand and highly essential to the progress
“of civilisation, it is remarkable that no undertaking
“has hitherto been promoted, which has had for its
“object the regular supply of the raw materials on
“such terms, as will enable the manufacturers to
“furnish the public with these inestimable boons at
“nominal prices.

“And yet it would be impossible to over-rate
“the importance of this great want, for it is universal,
“and one which is deeply felt by every grade of
“society from the highest to the lowest.

“To supply this want, and thus fill up a wide

“gap in our commercial industry, is the main object
“for which this company has been formed.

“And the directors have much pleasure in
“stating, that after entering into the minutest cal-
“culations, and allowing for every contingency,
“they have no hesitation in recommending the
“undertaking to the favourable consideration of
“intending investors.

“For when it is considered how largely the
“articles of daily consumption are indebted to a
“regular supply of sulphur the success of such a
“company becomes inevitable.

“To prove this it is only necessary to cite one
“or two familiar examples.

“Everybody, for instance, is in the habit of using
“common soda and chloride of lime, or at least
“ought to be, and even if that were not the case,
“they use articles which require those substances
“in their manufacture.

“Who, indeed, would like to confess that he
“was not accustomed to use soap and paper for
“some purpose or other? But still it is a painful
“fact, that in the present unsatisfactory state of
“things, we have to pay high prices for these indis-

“pensable articles of daily consumption, whereas,
“assuming this company to be in full operation,
“there is every probability of getting them for
“next to nothing.

“Again, it is well known that though brimstone
“and treacle is a medicine of the highest repute, it
“is now but sparingly indulged in by the children
“of the poor, owing to the difficulty of obtaining
“an abundant supply of the first ingredient, and the
“directors, therefore, feel that they are undertaking
“a national work in facilitating the supply. Ac-
“cording to the Report of their Mining Engineer,
“they have every reason to hope that they will soon
“be able to bring the luxury within the reach of
“the slenderest purse, and will, moreover, be able
“to contract with public schools on such terms as
“will enable them to allow each pupil a dose every
“morning all the year round, without materially
“altering their board and education tariffs. It is
“also proposed, out of the abundance of supply, to
“furnish the refuges for stray and destitute dogs
“with brimstone gratis, and here the directors look
“forward to the time with justifiable pride, for they
“will then be able to realise the words of our im-

“mortal bard, and literally ‘throw physic to the dogs.’ Heretofore, it has been too expensive for such lavish generosity.

“There is also another source of profit to which the directors look with feelings of lively satisfaction. As the nations of the earth progress in Christianity and mutual good will, so the demand for gunpowder increases, and, looking at contemporary history, the directors have the fullest confidence in supposing that even their vast resources will some day be taxed, in supplying this one element which advancing civilisation seems to require for cementing that universal brotherhood which it so constantly professes.

“In short, under any circumstances, the directors feel that the demand will always be a certainty, and they have consequently made such arrangements as will ensure an equal certainty in the supply.

“And for this purpose they beg to direct public attention to the provisional contract which they have entered into, and which may be inspected at the office of the Company’s solicitors.

“It will be found by this instrument that they

“ have acquired from his august majesty, King Pluto,
“ a concession for the exclusive right to work the
“ sulphur ore minerals which are so abundant in
“ his kingdom.

“ The mines are most advantageously situated,
“ and are surrounded by the river Acheron, whereby
“ a plentiful supply of water power and carriage may
“ always be obtained.

“ But, as the territory of His Majesty is more or
“ less known to all people, it is not deemed necessary
“ to enter into a minute description of the exact
“ locality in this prospectus, though the directors
“ may be pardoned for referring to the gratifying
“ fact, that it has been celebrated in the sublimest
“ poetry of Dante and Milton.

“ And they would further wish to state that it is
“ mainly owing to their long experience in matters
“ closely connected with His Majesty's dominions
“ that such a favourable concession has been ob-
“ tained. They have also been able to arrange that
“ all shareholders who may have occasion to visit
“ His Majesty's empire through the instrumentality
“ of this Company, shall receive especial considera-
“ tion on presenting their passports to Cerberus, the

“ambassador stationed there, who has received
“instructions to provide them with an unusually
“warm reception.

“And although the directors have not yet personally inspected the Company’s property, there
“is no doubt they will all have the opportunity of
“doing so some day.

“One remarkable feature, however, connected
“with the estate is the excellence of the roads, and
“the great facility of access. Indeed, the directors
“have a well-known and recognised authority for
“stating that broad is the way that leads to the
“locality of these mines, and judging from the
“immense numbers that traverse that way it is, to
“say the least, very popular.

“And, further, the directors would venture to
“submit another very remarkable feature in connection with His Majesty’s dominions generally, as
“tending to prove the great attachment exhibited
“by colonists for the country of their adoption. Notwithstanding that thousands flock there annually,
“there has not been a single instance known where
“an emigrant has returned, a circumstance which
“must necessarily conduce to the ultimate prosperity

“ of the colony, and consequent success of the
“ Company.

“ In conclusion, the directors beg to call attention
“ to the fact that the promoters are so convinced of
“ the future success of the undertaking that they
“ have elected to take £100,000 of the purchase
“ money in shares, thus identifying themselves with
“ the development of the scheme in a most substan-
“ tial manner ; also they would wish to call attention
“ to the trade mark which they have registered, and
“ thereby acquired the sole right of using, consisting
“ of a figure of His August Majesty seated on his
“ throne and holding in one hand a trident or three-
“ pronged sceptre, and in the other a key to the vast
“ treasures which have been ceded to the Company.
“ As this trade-mark is equally appropriate to a
“ large number of Joint Stock enterprises, there is no
“ doubt that it will be pirated, and the directors
“ would, therefore, beg to give notice that they will
“ be prepared to defend it as soon as any funds come
“ into their hands to enable them to do so.”

It is almost needless to say this prospectus was adopted *nem. con.* Every member was in perfect raptures about it, and even the solicitors, who are

very shrewd men, were so struck with the comprehensiveness of the scheme, that they not only registered the company on "spec," but even used their influence successfully, in getting a Financial Company to undertake the promotion on equally satisfactory terms.

The remaining items on the agenda then, were, the amount which was to be set aside for preliminary expenses, the consideration or purchase money, which was to be appropriated by the seven threadbare members for the valuable concession which they had obtained, and the form of the articles of association. Although such fabulous figures were placed at the head of the prospectus, it was not supposed even by the most sanguine, that more than about six thousand shares would be subscribed for, so it was thought better to be as moderate as possible under this head, otherwise the public might be frightened. Various meetings took place, and much discussion ensued before they were finally settled, but eventually the following figures were decided upon, subject to reduction *pro rata*, if a lesser number of shares were placed than we have mentioned.

Financial Company for promotion	-	-	£10,000
The seven threadbare members for purchase money the sum of £5,000 each	-	-	35,000
The solicitors' charges for Registration, drawing articles of association and other costs, as they might arise,	-	-	2,000
Secretary's salary, assuming the Company survived two years	-	-	1,800
Six Directors' fees, say £250 per year each, for two years,	-	-	3,000
Use of office, lunches, &c.	-	-	1,200
Mining Engineer	-	-	1,000
Cost of samples and incidentals	-	-	1,000
Estimated cost of liquidation	-	-	5,000
Amount to be expended in developing the business, and providing dividends for the shareholders	-	-	<i>Nil</i>
			<u>£60,000</u>

Adopting the *pro rata* system, then, you will easily understand, that if only half the above sum could be placed, each one of the items would have to be divided by two, except the last, and this it was arranged, should remain unaltered under any circumstances.

But in these calculations we are only dealing with the actual cash which these threadbare gentlemen imagined might possibly come within their hungry grasp. There is yet a very important question to be considered in framing the articles of association, and one which, if neglected, might defeat the whole end and aim of the enterprise. Assuming the out-

side public subscribed the amount indicated, there would be associated with it an immense number of votes, and a proportionate power (according to scale) to interfere in the management of the company. This, to say the least, would be obviously inconvenient, and must be counteracted. For, as you may well imagine, the shareholders might step in before all the money was called up, and finding the undertaking an imposture, they might not only eject the directors, but obtain a petition for early winding-up, thereby relieving themselves of some part of their liability. Nay, perhaps it will occur to you they might even go further, and prosecute the directors and promoters for fraud ; but, looking at the cases which have already been tried, no reasonable men would be so foolish as to spend their money in such a fruitless object as that. It is risky under any circumstances, and may be regarded as nothing short of positive folly where any attention has been devoted to the special purpose of defeating the penal clauses of the Act.

Well, this impunity may be secured, and is constantly secured, by a very simple process, which forcibly shows how roguish ingenuity may com-

pletely baffle and bamboozle the naive and superficial wisdom of our legislators.

In the present instance it was accomplished in this wise, and indeed, in most cases, the operation is precisely the same.

If six thousand shares were allotted, they would not in all probability represent more than twelve hundred votes under the most unfavourable circumstances, for while few people would apply for less than five shares, many would take ten at the least ; and it is a remarkable feature in the Articles of Association appended to the Act, that a shareholder's influence in the regulation of a company decreases in proportion to the pecuniary interest he has in the welfare of the concern, or, in other words, it has vested more power in ten separate shareholders whose aggregate holdings of ten shares each may only amount to £1000, than it has given to the single shareholder who may have invested £8000 in the concern. Why, or wherefore, this is so is a mystery to all logical men, for when money is made a standard it is hard to understand why £1000 should be quite as potent under certain conditions as eight times the amount.

But leaving these abstract considerations to those whom they may concern, and taking for a basis the possibility that there might be twelve hundred votes to contend against in the present case, it is necessary to adopt some means of neutralising them. Hence, we find in the prospectus, that the proprietors having great confidence in the scheme, have consented to accept, in part payment of the purchase money, £100,000 in fully paid up shares.

Of course, most people are aware, that fully paid-up shares have no liability attached to them, but few people reflect that these same shares when judiciously scattered amongst nominees of the promoters, are neither more nor less than dishonest contrivances for depriving the real shareholders of any power in the administration of the Company's affairs. So it was in the Plutonic Sulphur Ore Company, and so it has been in scores of other undertakings which have come before the public.

And, for the rest, it may be briefly recorded that the shares in this concern were rapidly taken up, that the Company thrived for one year and eight months, that most of the capital was called up according to previous arrangement, and that when the

liquidators had done with the shareholders (or rather, contributories as they ultimately became), they had paid nine pounds ten for each share they held, and accounted themselves lucky in not being called upon for the other ten shillings. As a set-off, however, it is only fair to state that there was some rumour of their executors being likely to receive a rebate of three pence or four pence in the pound, when the Company was finally wound up : but as yet the liquidators have not moved in the matter, and it would therefore be premature, to say whether such a handsome return is likely to be realised or not.

Meanwhile, it may be remarked that the seven threadbare members are now prosperous men, in the full enjoyment of that reward which sooner or later crowns the efforts of the ingenious ; and, as far as we can glean, we believe their time is agreeably employed, partly in the furtherance of charitable objects, partly in the pursuit of pleasure, and partly in the promotion of another scheme, which latter is to eclipse the Sulphur Ore Company both in its advantage to the public, and in the magnitude of its operations.

BOB SHEARS,

THE BARBER.

A TRAGICAL BALLAD.

I.

BOB SHEARS had ne'er a birthday,
For he first came to grief
By landing on a third floor back,
At midnight—like a thief.

II.

His father was a working man,—
Which means, you may be sure,
That he'd to toil from morn till eve,
For sake of being poor.

III.

He sent Bob to a humble school,
The best he could afford ;
They'd but a twig of knowledge then,
Where now we have a " Board."

IV.

Yet even to that slender twig,
He never seemed inclined,
Nor could a birch e'er plant the tree
Of knowledge, in his mind.

V.

So, they bound him to a shaving-man,
Still he was such a mole,
That 'twas years before his wooden head
Could raise a barber's pole.

VI.

Umbrellas, too, he learned to make,
Twin trades, I trow, well met ;
For while you're kept from too much hair,
You're screen'd from too much wet.

VII.

Now, in the Dials Bob took his shop,
Then thought he'd take a wife,
And he singled out one Mary Wade,
To wade with him through life.

VIII.

But alas they two were made one flesh,
Ere they knew their souls were twain,
And found too late, that melting tears
Wouldn't *tear 'em* apart again.

IX.

For tho' Bob tried to rule his wife,
As every husband tries,
He found her blind to good advice,
Till he'd blinded both her eyes.

X.

The whole day long her voice was heard,
With a bell-like power of lung,
But what always made Bob's temper *ire*,
Was her low and vulgar tongue.

XI.

Besides, she took to drinking hard,
Which filled his heart with fear,
And yet he wished she'd *ail* enough,
To make her want a *bier*.

XII.

And, when she'd borne him six small babes,
To multiply his trials,
He couldn't see how eight hungry mouths
Could thrive on Seven Dials.

XIII.

So, one fatal night when she was drunk,
The fiend in him grew stronger,
And he cut off all his little heirs
From growing any longer.

XIV.

Then he apostrophised his wife,
And said amidst his tears,
"Our love has ne'er been riveted, Poll,
Since we were a pair of Shears."

XV.

But, wretched sot, she heard him not—
And as Bob bemoaned her plight,
He thought, to exorcise such spirits
Was to exercise a right.

XVI.

Still, if truth be told, it tried him hard,
And cost him many a sigh,
Tho' all barbers say, that grey-haired folks,
Should be prepared to *dye*.

XVII.

And, as he trembling wrought the deed,
The knife seemed but to graze her,
And yet she started up with pain,
Before he thought to raise her.

XVIII.

Then, her dying groans alarmed some men,
And they shrieked out "Police,"
Who dragged Bob through a noisy crowd,
To a justice of the peace.

XIX.

The magistrate looked grave, and said,
"Why this is shocking murder,
I must send it to a court above,
Where they'll send the pris'ner further."

XX.

"I'm afraid your worship's right," cried Bob,
"For now my fault, I see,
But as I cannot change the past,
Pr'aps the law will *halter* me."

XXI.

And, when the jury found a Bill
With half a score of counts,
Said he, "they're heavy charges these,
And yet I've no amounts."

XXII.

But the Court decreed him liable,
And for his black cap beck'ning,
The Judge prepared to tell Bob how,
To settle his last reck'ning,

XXIII.

Still he paused to ask, if aught there was,
Why sentence shouldn't be passed—
"It's of little use," poor Bob replied,
"If I pass away at last."

XXIV.

Now, when the awful morning dawn'd,
And he saw the hangman's face,
The blood coursed swiftly through his veins,
As one who'd run his race.

XXV.

"Oh, pinion me tightly," then he cried,
"I've had loose habits since birth ;
Yet in these fetters I'd rather die,
Than break this last tie on earth."

XXVI.

And as the fun'ral knell toll'd out,
His tremor he couldn't check,
Said he, "why do they ring a bell,
Before they wring your neck?"

XXVII.

"Ah!" quoth the Chaplain, "you'll soon be
Beyond this worldly worry."—
"I think you much kind, sir," said Bob,
"Still I'm in no break-neck hurry."

XXVIII.

"But to 'scape Old Bailey's dismal gloom,
And go through New-gate to Heav'n ;
Isn't, I'm sure, such an awful doom,
For a murderer of seven.

XXIX.

"Thus the scaffold has a *beam* of hope,
For e'en the most gallows men,
Who confess before a dangling rope,
They *did it* and won't again."

XXX.

Then, of course, poor Bob was penitent,
No sinner was e'er sadder,
Who mounted straight to realms above,
On William Calcraft's ladder.

XXXI.

"But," said he to Bill, "you shouldn't kill,
Poor culprits for worldly pelf ;
If you'll only give me rope enough,
I'll try and hang myself."

XXXII.

“ Ah no,” quoth Bill, “ to do it yourself
Would soul-murder be beside ;
I take the sole-sin on my head,
From the time your hands are tied.”

XXXIII.

So then was loosed the fatal drop,
With not a little jolt ;
And when it had giv’n Bob a *screw*,
His spirit took a *bolt*.

XXXIV.

And for a warning to all those,
Who make great sins their brag,
A glimpse was giv’n of a felon’s grave,
By raising up a flag.

XXXV.

And long after Bob had ceased to breathe,
A coroner sat, ’tis said,
To enquire if his lifeless corpse,
Was strictly speaking dead.

XXXVI.

Then, they put quick-lime upon his clay
That it might mould the faster,
And when the lime was duly slacked,
They moulded him in plaister.

XXXVII.

And still, they could not let him rest
In his mortuary of lime ;
But must needs build him up in wax,
For a model to all time.

XXXVIII.

Thus you may see him as on earth,
And if underground you go,
They'll pull you up at Baker Street,
For the Resurrection show.

XXXIX.

He's all among a dreadful lot,
Whose morals were very lax ;
And as a premium on their vice,
They charge six-pence income-tax !

DIRECTORS.

SERIOUS VERSES DEDICATED TO BUBBLE-
COMPANY-MONGERS.

WHO are they that are always promoting
Dishonest schemes on every hand,
That never rest unless they are floating
Unseaworthy craft, they know must strand ;
That insure it first by mis-statement and fraud,
Then scuttle the vessel, and travel abroad ?
Directors !

Who are they that thrive on the thrift of others,
The hard-won scrapings of honest lives ;
That fling ruin broadcast 'mong their brothers,
And blast their homes, their children, and their
wives ;
That trade on titles given to them of old,
And barter ancestral names for lust of gold ?
Directors !

Directors !

Directors !

Directors !

Who are they that have lowered the standard
Of morality 'mongst trading men,
And made English probity a bye-word,
Not believed in by one in ten ;
That have made of the Companies Act a snare,
And caused "limited" to signify "beware" ?
Directors !

Who are they that cram the maws of vultures,
And make food for wreckers in the city,
With their endless suits and litigation,
While their dupes starve without hope or pity ;
That bleed shareholders until winding-up's projected,
Then leave them in Chancery, to be dissected ?
Directors !

Who are they that encounter prosecution,
With all the flower of the English Bar,
And outbrazen the trembling form of Justice
As she stands forsaken and afar ;
That elude the jailor, however wary,
And sidle out by a certiorari ?

Directors !

If then, there be an avenging sprite,
Or aught of truth in religious creeds,
Oh, Satan, call a General Meeting,
To enquire into these Joint Stock deeds ;
Bring before it a tearful widow,
Once happy children, now deprived of bread ;
Show it the corpse of the wretched father
With bleeding bullet-hole through his head ;
And, if punishment eternal be thy aim,—
It's woe to them who've betrayed that ill-used
name—
Directors !

THE REFLECTIONS OF A CAB HORSE.

A PATHETIC MONODY.

I.

OH, the happy hours of colthood,
Now, alas, for ever fled,
When I lived 'mong grass and clover,
With my mère, so long since dead !
How little I thought the green soft turf,
Would be changed for clatt'ring stones,
Or that I should ever get so thin,
That my hide wouldn't hide my bones !

II.

It isn't that I came of shabby folks :
I'd a hunter for a sire,
And the dam to whom I owed my life,
Was the pride of a country squire ;

But it's all because a silly groom,
In ignorance the sin did,
For he stuffed me first, then made me run,
Till I was broken-winded.

III.

So, now I'm but a wretched hack,
With spavined joints and hocks ;
They scarcely ever curry me,
Or trim my rough fetlocks.
If this be the life I've to endure,
For pity's sake let me die ;
Nay, rather than be a town fly-horse,
I'd become a free horse-fly.

IV.

Of provender, too, once thirty pounds,
Each day I'd what I chose,
But now, I scarcely smell the oats
In the bag put round my nose.
My joy at one small wisp of hay,
Brings on a grim horse laugh ;
For it's no joke, I'm sure, for any brute,
To swallow a cabby's " chaff."

V.

And besides, they keep me out all night,
Oft driving to queer places,
There's not a trace of rest for me
When once I'm in the traces ;
And though the cab is sometimes crammed,
I'm never full inside,
And I often find it hard to walk,
When people want to ride.

VI.

But still, I always strive to please,
Though it's seldom I succeed,
For hunger's pangs, however slow,
Reduce a horse's speed ;
Yet, to live I 'spose 'tis precious hard,
As generosity's so rare,
And if Cabby stints a "screw" like me,
It's for want of a lib'ral fare.

VII.

For tho' there is a society,
From cruelty to screen us,
It would take a lot of public good
To atone for private meanness ;

Not, that I would breathe one single "neigh"
Against mutual use of wealth,
But still, I think there's a nobler thing
They call charity by stealth.

VIII.

For, that we deserve a better fate,
In justice must be owned,
We're drudges to ev'ry shade of life,
From church to demi-monde.
All weathers we brave, both cold and wet,
Servants of pleasure meanwhile,
That's heedless of the terrible pain,
We sell at sixpence a mile.

IX.

And e'en when these weary miles are done,
I've a shed not fit to use—
'There's naught that I know of so dismal
As going home to a mews;
It's enough to drive a horse to vice,
To be kept in such sad fettle,
And yet, though I chew a bit of iron,
I haven't a bit of mettle.

X.

Well may I long for the time to come,
When I shall have run my tether ;
It's far worse to be leathered in harness
Than turned into harness leather ;
My sorrows, might p'raps, then end in size,
And my hair adorn some seat ;
But after that, the knacker must whistle—
For one skew'r of cat or dog's meat.

A CHURCH-GOING BELLE.

CAST 1871.

A DAINTY little bonnet,
The sweetest marabout,
A sea of tawny wavelets
O'er forehead white as snow,
A brace of sparkling sapphires,
Two cheeks of rosy dye,
A pair of lips of ruby,
And a fascinating sigh.

Think'st thou she goes to worship?
Ah! it is difficult to tell,
But it's plain both saints and sinners
Worship that Sabbath Belle.

A tightly fitting bodice,
Costume all brocaded,
Short petticoats with flounces,
In endless colours braided,

Enamelled shoes with buckles,
Such as the Frenchmen vend,
With lofty taper heel-taps,
To give a Grecian bend.

Think'st thou it's for God's glory
She dresses out so well ?
Or does she want some saint or sinner
To love the Sabbath Belle ?

A dozen little knick-knacks,
Long streamers, pads and cuffs,
A natty little collar,—
She's too genteel for ruffs ;
A host of showy trinkets,
Pale lavender kid gloves ;
In short, the very sort of Belle
The saint or sinner loves.

But think'st thou that mere devotion
Wants aught so grand and trim,
Or do pretty maids who go to pray,
Go likewise for a hymn ?

WILFRED WILDBLOOD.

A BURLESQUE NOVEL.

CHAPTER I.

MAKING LOVE BY STEAM.

WE are about to tempt the reader into a perilous undertaking, for if he would become acquainted with the first chapter of this important history, he will have to go a journey by rail.

Should he be of a nervous temperament, and one having much regard for his own safety, he had perhaps better stay at home.

Is he, on the other hand, of an intrepid disposition, and one having venturesome tendencies, such as are willing to seek excitement at considerable bodily risk, he may probably derive some gratification by deciding upon bearing us company.

We cannot promise him a trip absolutely free from danger, but we can endeavour to amuse him so long as his life is spared.

And, that he may enter into the spirit of the thing with a calm and unruffled mind, we would affectionately urge him to make and publish his last will and testament. It would be simply absurd for him to try and enjoy himself until he had comfortably disposed of all his relations. And in order that such a document may be worth proving, he might wisely invest a modicum of his personal estate in the purchase of an insurance ticket, for if he be not blessed with wife or children, it will be the means of ensuring for his remains (should there be any) that degree of respect which is flattering, if not exactly useful. After this is done, he might well bestow a passing thought on present need, and provide himself with a moderate stoup of liquor to soothe his dying agony, or, failing that contingency, to drink to the health of the Company, for a safe deliverance.

Mind, we do not recommend these careful precautions with any desire to terrify him, but merely to make him happy in any event. Indeed, we pro-

pose to travel on one of the safest lines in the Kingdom, and if it is any consolation, we will candidly confess, that the points do sometimes act, the goods trains are now and then shunted in time, and the passengers do occasionally reach their destination in safety. But what mortal enthusiast would be so unreasonable as to expect accidents like these every day?

If there be any such sanguine people abroad, let them come with us to the London terminus of this particular Company, which, by the way, is entitled "The Great Burnham Jolt and Surgical Anatomy Line;" and while we are taking our tickets, they can employ their time in examining the elaborate contrivances of the Directors, for the public behoof.

The station is very well known to most people, and scarcely needs any description in these pages. It is a large and conspicuous building, furnished with every facility which ingenuity can devise, for bringing passengers into contact with collision and caloric. Among these may be mentioned, slow locomotives to precede the fast ones, coupling chains warranted to snap at the proper time, worn

out iron wheels with flaws in them, defective tires guaranteed to run off the metals, and time tables so framed, as to develop all these obvious advantages.

And, in addition to such favourable conditions, it is only fair to the Directors to allude, at the same time, to their comprehensive and mysterious system of signalling, for though they are firmly bound to the humane policy of checking the alarming redundancy in the population, they are expected, in the present state of false delicacy, to show some small respect for the sanctity of human life.

Hence it will be found that every line really carries out its own particular "Block" system, whatever may be its nominal signification, otherwise we do not see how it could happen that the permanent way is so often "blocked" with smashed up rolling stock, and human bodies in various stages of contusion and dislocation.

And although, in the course of this chapter, we shall have to pass many visible embodiments of this famous system, yet, as we should not like to interrupt our narrative when it is just beginning to get interesting, we will take a cursory glance at one

of these signal stations in anticipation, and the reader must be satisfied to accept it as a sample of the whole.

Those who are acquainted with the Great Burnham Jolt and Surgical Anatomy Line, will have noticed a formidable looking structure called the Lockjaw Signal Box. It is situated a little distance on the "up" side of Livingtombe Tunnel, and the position is well chosen, because if collisions must take place, it is well there should be some precautions against their occurring where the surrounding masonry was at all likely to be damaged. Should you approach it by day, you will perceive it has a bewildering cluster of arms which it jerks about in the most spasmodic and painful manner. At night, however, these are at rest, for like the cat, it has a wonderful faculty for seeing in the dark, and does not therefore require them. It also has a further resemblance to that animal in the matter of colour, for when it would indicate caution, it facetiously points to the "green in its eye." Again, if it would wish to warn you of danger, it sends forth a baleful flash of red in your face, and if at such a time you should have any *per contra* accounts to settle with your

fellow men, we strongly advise you to balance them up without delay.

Well, no doubt these devices are very clever and curious, and probably if you came to go deeply into the thing, you would find that every conceivable and inconceivable movement of that huge machine had at least a half-a-dozen patents, specifications, and chancery suits, respectively, hanging to it; but there is one other incidental circumstance connected with the system which affects us more seriously than all the rest. The patentees only supply the *machine*, but it is the directors who supply the *motive power*.

So, you will readily understand, as a natural consequence, how the one is likely to defeat the other. By adopting the machine, the directors can give some colouring to their apparent solicitude for your and my safety. But by applying insufficient motive power they are enabled at the same time to promote the non-redundancy policy to their heart's content. For if you glance inside that famous Lockjaw signal-box, you will not unfrequently find the motive power fast asleep. The man has perhaps been tugging at levers and lock-

ing signals, for some twelve or fifteen hours, and Nature, which at all times is so unreasonable, has at last sent her inspector Morpheus to lock up his senses too.

Thus, you will easily realise how it is that collisions so often happen, and how, in fact, the public mind is kept constantly familiar with the oft-recurring triumphs of this celebrated "block" system.

If, then, the reader has been able to glean from these preliminary remarks just a slight notion of what he may possibly encounter, in a journey on the Great Burnham Jolt and Surgical Anatomy Line, we need say no more on this point, for he will scarcely be able to accuse us of having led him into danger without first opening his eyes.

Meanwhile, we are free to revert to the interesting theme at the head of the present chapter, and to proceed to expound it with that degree of fullness which may seem consonant with the proper elucidation of our story.

Making love by steam is a process that cannot fail to have some attractions for most people. As a subject, too, it will demand unusually florid treatment and fervid extravagance of diction. It is not

easy to do justice to it in the passionless and prosaic vernacular of an Englishman, though, as a medium for trading and labelling goods this language may do excellently well ; but, for the graceful handling of such a delicate affection as love, it requires all the depth and profundity of the German, much of the fanciful filigree and elegant polish of the French, and here and there a happy dash of the vowel sweetness of the Italian.

But, of course, we cannot avail ourselves of these varied resources, partly on account of the ignorance of the public, and partly owing to the incompetency of the author ; so that if any of the pathos or bathos occurring hereafter, should appear droll by reason of the intensity infused into a naturally defective language, let the reader excuse it accordingly.

At the very outset it may be deemed somewhat anomalous, to *commence* anything at a Railway *Terminus*, but the company is to blame for applying to a principal station a name which only describes half its purpose. Although, the representatives of those people who have entered its portals to summarily close their earthly career, may

consider the term well chosen and suitable enough. It was, then, a glaring summer day, and the rays of the sun were naturally rather warm. There are ardent writers who describe such days as glorious, and the definition would convey a sufficiently correct idea, to those who are in the habit of tracing a synonymous relationship between "glory" and being roasted alive.

On the "down" platform might have been seen an exceedingly active and comely-looking young man buzzing about amongst the crowd of passengers and officials, and cunningly peeping into the various carriages of the train which was presently to start with a living freight of ticket-holders, all expecting to go to the several places indicated on their passports, but all, in fact, destined to be taken whithersoever chance and pointsmen might ultimately decide upon landing them. In one hand he held a silken handkerchief to check the diaphoretic tendency of the weather, and in the other he carried a swollen bag, which though insensible to perspiration, seemed to crave some relief of the sort to reduce its unwieldy bulk. Suddenly he stopped in front of a second-class compartment,

and, as if acting on the impulse of the moment, he as suddenly entered it, dragging after him his plethoric bag with an effort that quickly brought the silken handkerchief into further use. Perhaps it is needless to add, that the name of this enterprising gentleman was Wilfred Wildblood, and that when he entered that railway carriage he was perfectly innocent of being about to play a leading part in this absorbing drama. He was not, however, unconscious of the presence of a third party, or rather we should say a second party, for it is not easy to comprehend how we can apply the figure three to one of two.

But even admitting this, he had no conception that the events, which were about to follow, would be instrumental in bringing about a revolution, which bids fair to shake the ordinary method of love-making to its very foundation. Little cared he for pining spinsterhood, totally heedless was he of chicken-hearted Cupid-dawdlers, and wholly indifferent was he to the protracted cruelty of eternal courtship. And yet, he was to be the humble means of inaugurating a new and important era, of laying before the world a grand theory for the cure

How such an attractive principle could have been so long neglected is a source of wonderment to the writer, unless indeed the transient perils of a railway journey are more dreaded by the fair sex than life-long single-blessedness.

The prospect of sudden death, is certainly not agreeable to contemplate, except, perchance, in the case of blighted hopes and utter destitution ; but it is a great question for a spinster to consider, whether it is not better to incur the temporary risk, than waste her divine sweetness in a purposeless existence. And yet, it must not be supposed that all the favourable conditions which are about to reveal themselves, and which enable us to pourtray such a startling example of prompt love-making, are of frequent occurrence.

Personal attractions in the lady might be wanting, while men of Wilfred's gushing tenderness, and business-like habits, are known to be scarce, to say nothing of opportunity, which is not always so propitious.

Still, this chapter may be diluted to suit altered circumstances, and milder temperaments. There is no doubt it will bear the process very well, for in

every respect, it may safely be said to be considerably over proof, and in the matter of quality and quantity, it is equally unquestionable.

But while we are explaining, the train is speeding onwards at forty miles an hour, so let us at once carry our imagination to that one pleasant retreat, now far removed from the rude gaze of the vulgar world.

Picture, if you can, a second-class compartment, with American leather fittings, on a hot July day! Think of the comfortable seats, with their resinous affection for your nether garments! Behold with gratitude the bulging appliances behind, and consider what the company has done for your gratification and convenience. Appreciate this, by leaning back and taking your ease. Realise it, by trying to lean forward and finding yourself glued to the spot. Then bestow a glance at the greasy lining of the vacant seats, and see how their dull russet tints are quickly whitened with bright clouds of dust, until the whole aspect of the carriage is changed, and everything looks light and cheerful. Reflect, too, how this same dust tones down your own florid complexion, until it has all the delicacy of a half-

roasted cook, under the influence of a flour dredger. Add to these advantages a genial atmosphere of ninety-five degrees of heat, and then say if there ever was in the bosom of nature a secret bower so well adapted to platonic love-brewing?

Such, at any rate, were some of the favourable conditions under which we find the manly form of Wilfred Wildblood, confronting the womanly form of Catherine Gribble!

Curious it may have been that both of them should be journeying the same way. Strange, no doubt, that both should have been led by the mysterious hand of fate to take second-class tickets to Splynter Junction, but, oh, how marvellous was it that they should have selected the very same compartment, and that an officious public should have left them alone. Mark that, *alone!* and envy them accordingly.

How far the train had proceeded before the first electric spark of the impending storm of affection was flashed across from eye to eye, it boots us not to say. Only slaves and pedagogues cling to latitudes and longitudes, for they are but worms crawling in a dusty maze of figures. We are soar-

ing eagles with elastic minds, and therefore free to speculate, to lie, and to prevaricate.

Sufficient, then, for us that soon after the train had emerged from Livingtombe tunnel, we find Cupid hard at work. And all things considered, we can assure you it was something to be Wilfred Wildblood at that happy moment! What can there be more beautiful than the first dawn of love? It seems to smooth over the rough asperity of our brutal nature, and search out the little bit of silver in our leaden bodies. It is the great refining crucible wherein all the rude passions converge, to the end that everything in the universe may be melted down and ultimately brought into subjection to this one all-pervading and melodious sentiment. This much may be said of it under any circumstances, but when it germinates in the consecrated precincts of a railway carriage lined with American leather, what heaven-born seraph could find tongue to express its celestial attributes?

And, oh, how happy is the love which having so taken root finds two such hearts to welcome it as now beat within the respective bosoms of Wilfred Wildblood and Catherine Gribble?

Does not the sun like to smile on beautiful flowers? and does not love flourish best when it capers capriciously with considerable external embellishments? Believe us, gentle reader, it fairly revelled in that favoured compartment on that particular July day. Oh, the radiant and beaming countenance of Catherine Gribble at that moment!

Oh, the bright responsive smile, and crisp whiskers of Wilfred Wildblood the moment after! Oh, the ecstatic and bewildering blending of elective affinities that made up the gorgeous *tout ensemble* for a full half hour following!

Well may such joy as this resent all vulgar intrusion—well may it look jealously at prying officials, and little wonder that Cupid should angrily flap his wings in the face of him who would invade the secrecy of Psyche's enchanted palace.

But what fine feelings can you expect from people who are welded together in such a corporate device as the Great Burnham Jolt and Surgical Anatomy Line?

For, scarcely had the train passed over Petroleum Points, than a desperate brute of a guard

forced his huge body into the very midst of our compartment, and demanded to examine such unlovely things as railway tickets ! Have we not already declared that both our characters were bound for Splynter Junction ? Why and wherefore then should we be interrupted, and why, forsooth, should such a rapturous scene be desecrated with the unholy presence of an ordinary mortal ?

Nay, Mr. Guard, it is simply intolerable, so pray be brisk with thy snipping machine, and once more turn the key and be off.

Meanwhile, let us resume the subject, and wander again into the boundless realms of fancy. There is some delicate work to be done, we can tell you, so let us plunge our matter-of-fact pen into flowing rivers of Parnassian dew. It is difficult to approach the charms of any woman in plain prose ; but how impossible is it through such a medium to render full justice to thy unspeakable attractions, oh, Catherine Gribble !

Say not love is venal, poor jilted man ; speak not, we implore thee, of woman's inconstancy in the face of such a story as this. If female ever did play thee false, thou may'st lay this flattering

unction to thy soul—it never happened in a second-class railway carriage lined with American leather.

Only look at the lithe and graceful form of Catherine, and own thy shame. Is there aught of deception lurking behind that open and charming countenance? Drink deeply, we prithee, of that bright winning smile, and tell us, then, if there is not a throbbing turmoil within the bosom of thy twelve and sixpenny fancy vest? And look lovingly on the glossy enamel of those splendid rows of teeth—even, regular, and twin-like. Think'st thou that journeymen dentist could match them at five shillings a-piece? Was oyster-shell ever so pearl-like and brilliant? Do they not far out-shine the prepared tusks of a male elephant, which vulgar commerce calls ivory? Could they, in a word, have ever been intended by nature for the rude purpose of mastication, when it must have known that ornamental novelists would not suffer their pages to be blurred with such a common thought?

Again, we would have thee glance with conscious diffidence at that snowy, swan-like neck—

“For, all for heat, was laid aside
Her wimple, and her hood untied.”

Aye, and as she gently threw off her shawl and loosened her outward drapery, there might have been seen (recollect we only say there *might* have been seen, for we know not whether ladies intend that it should be seen) a modest expanse of heaving bosom, white as the finest compact variety of gypsum, commonly known as alabaster, and as fair as a delicate curtain of gauze could make it. We are not good at describing these bewitching charms, but we have no doubt endless graces were hoarded there, such as elective affinity can only properly realise.

And where, indeed, should we end if we attempted to lay before the reader all the surprising loveliness of Catherine Gribble? Who do you think could estimate her innumerable attractions both latent and sparkling? What price could be put on the casket that contained the precious jewels of beauty which lay spread out before the transported gaze of Wilfred Wildblood, with all the naïve innocence which seemed to whisper, "I ask but a magic ring, and these fairy-like treasures are thine, even unto the appurtenant consequences thereunto belonging."

Will you then, say that love is venal after this, for mark you, up to the present juncture, she had said not a word to the confiding young man about his worldly circumstances.

But still, it must be conceded that she may have been dazzled in her turn with his manifold and athletic beauties.

It is seldom in real life that men with so many perfections are to be met with, and even in the pages of romance it is not often that the mind is refreshed with such a glowing picture of heroic and spasmodic devotion.

Poets may sing of Apollo ; painters may go crazy after his dusty old statue unearthed at the ruins of Antium ; the Pope may embalm him in his Belvidere at the Vatican, but be it recorded that none of these had ever beheld the magnificent proportions of Wilfred Wildblood !

Who, we should like to know, will run mad after an obsolete Grecian image, with scarce a vestige of drapery about his figure, when we have presented them with a piece of living sculpture attired in all the luxury of a modern Houndsditch ? We could never discover such attractions in Apollo

Belvidere. *He* hadn't a gold watch and chain and horseshoe scarf pin. Wilfred Wildblood *had*. *He* didn't travel in the wholesale grocery line. Wilfred Wildblood *did*. He only sent an arrow through the ugly serpent Python when he was a big man.—Wilfred Wildblood impaled a ferocious blue-bottle when he was only a four-year old !

Why, then, should people talk such pedantic rubbish about these classical myths when they have a Wilfred Wildblood living and breathing amongst them? If Hercules was strong, so was Wilfred ; if Hercules could destroy a huge lion on Mount Cithæron, surely Wilfred could shoot one in the Zoological Gardens !

Again, Hercules only captured one wild boar, while we know of a truth that Wilfred Wildblood has driven dozens of male pigs into his father's slaughter house. And, then, again, all that stupid nonsense about the Augean stables, when, positively Wilfred used to clean out his father's cattle sheds, after several oxen had been confined there for nights together.

No, good reader, there was but one little feat achieved by Hercules when he charmed the whole

fifty daughters of King Thespius, that we should be sorry to lay to the charge of Wilfred. Besides, you are aware that now-a-days even royalty itself is not usually blessed with such large families of girls, however much the fact may be deplored by loyal subjects and emigrating princes.

But then, what did it matter to our hero, when he had within him that which could permanently secure the inestimable treasures of a Catherine Gribble, in the short space of a railway journey? Such a substantial triumph was worth all your mythological rubbish, and we have no hesitation in saying, that Wilfred at this moment would have refused to change places with anybody, either ancient or modern.

If there's any doubt about it just glance at his beaming countenance, radiant and florid as it always is, when reflecting internal gratification. A common radish would be dull and tame to it; the tints of a boiled lobster would fail to do it justice, and indeed the only simile we can find which will give you the faintest idea, is the glistening bright redness of a Greenwich prawn.

We dare say many of you will have seen this

humble sea-crustacean somewhere, and we are glad of it, because we wish to make ourselves perfectly understood.

So, much then, for the extrinsic adornment of these two turtle doves, for we are loth to believe we have omitted very much. And truly we may add, with a modicum of pride, that if you will carefully look the inventory through, the idea may strike you in some sort, that there was not in either hemisphere on that July day, anything like so much outward beauty, as we have managed to crowd into a second-class railway compartment. At least that's the view we wish you to be good enough to adopt. And, considering all things, you will not say it is so unreasonable. On cursorily measuring that compartment with the eye, it might possibly be put down at seven feet by four. Well, looking at the limited size of the globe, you can't call a novelist extravagant who backs seven by four against the world. Certainly not, when one horse is so often taken against the field.

But lest this illustration should be somewhat obscure to those lady readers who are innocent of sporting proclivities, we will promise them not

another allusion to this dreadful subject, although, if they are anxious for further information, we cannot do better than refer them to our petticoat contemporaries, who occasionally display a wonderful aptitude for turfy matters of all kinds.

And yet we can scarcely blame them, for how can we expect every genius to create forms so pure and free from guile, as Catherine Gribble and Wilfred Wildblood! With plumage so gorgeous one does not often find the intrinsic elements so untarnished with the small vices of human vanity, or the inward nature so ingenuous and confiding. And, perhaps, before proceeding to transcribe their mutual warblings in illustration of these qualities, we may well devote a small space to a description of the natural objects which afforded them so many opportunities of exchanging their sentiments.

The train has just cleared the "Coroner's Inquest" station, and a broad and undulating expanse of pastoral loveliness is now at our disposal. The golden ears of corn were ripening in the fruitful meadows, and everywhere there seemed to be a luxuriant profusion of everything to gladden the heart of man.

There were multifarious oxen and cows scattered in different spots over the landscape, and certain young calves which had been bred in the usual manner, and were now grazing away with some prospective hope of figuring in a Metropolitan Cattle Show.

There were also sundry flocks of fleecy sheep, and a few playful lambkins of mature growth, which having escaped the carnivorous ferocity for early mutton, were calmly browsing on the hill-side as unconcernedly as if this eventful history were not being written. Away down in the distant farm-yards, moreover, might be descried a large assortment of land porpoises lazily diverting themselves in the greasy mire, and unconsciously, but eloquently, working out Lord Brougham's great educational theory, wherein he hoped that the day might soon arrive, when every peasant in the land should become acquainted with Bacon.

And added to all these, a strict observer of nature would doubtless have discovered here and there a few white Dorkings, with their lively broods of chicks singing as cheerful music as may sometimes be got out of a baby's wicker rattle, but ducks

seemed scarce and expensive, and stubble geese, we suppose, were not yet in season.

But, of all the useful farming stock, which was being thus leisurely surveyed by Wilfred and Catherine, at forty miles an hour, a few cows and their attendant milkmaids received most attention.

And no wonder ; for have not such scenes been celebrated alike by poet and painter ? Even a metropolitan dairy, where a score of carbon-stained cows are methodically milked at six and two, by a host of town-bred sweeps, has not escaped the pitiful poetaster.

But glance down yonder (for the train is now passing over the Breakdown Viaduct), and say whether the sight is not likely to awaken sublime emotions in the breast of him who dwells amongst a million furnaces that *don't* consume their own smoke ! Is it not a relief to behold country maids and country cows unbesmeared by all the diabolical blackness of Wallsend and Silkstone ?

Besides, is there a man amongst us who can look unmoved at a three-legged stool, with a rustic virgin seated upon it ? Is it possible to witness the graceful postures, the *négligé* costume, and the

said seven, the hand would have been instantly withdrawn; but now it reposed listlessly in his glowing palm, which took about nine and a half of Cheapside dogskin.

"I never imagined my hand was smaller than other ladies," trilled out the blushing Gribble, with just the faintest suspicion of vanity.

"Ah! my darling Kate!"

"I think you are forgetting yourself, sir. How came you to know my name?"

"Forgive me, I saw it on that dear band-box. I must speak. The very ground on which you walk will be sacred to me for evermore; its no use mincing matters. I'm deeply, madly in love with you. This fairy-like hand will rule my destiny; that bright smile will follow me about from shop to shop; without you I can never travel through life in the grocery line. I should not have heart to beg for orders, unless I knew my every effort would extort an approving smile from my lovely Catherine Gribble. Oh, say you'll be mine, or I shall be driven to distraction, perhaps suicide; my travelling case is full of poison. Drive me not to that; our green tea is fatal stuff."

The confiding maiden was thunderstruck for several moments. The peach-bloom flitted over her agitated face like the fitful sunlight coming and going over a beautiful picture in which the colours are very brilliant.

It was a very trying moment for her. It is indeed a very trying moment for any girl under ordinary circumstances; but how few are there who ever experienced the thrilling emotion of hearing such words spoken by a Wilfred Wildblood.

No wonder then, the blood welled up in her throat; no wonder that she vainly tried to give utterance to the intensity of her feelings; no wonder a pause ensued.

The suddenness of the situation is certainly enough to upset the equanimity of anybody, but it is by no means so startling as would at first-sight appear to a person in the outer world, and herein may be gathered some further idea of our reason for calling this a novel of purpose. Very few people in everyday life are acquainted with the magical influence of a second-class railway carriage. To ladies who have been courting for many years, it is especially important. If you have any charms

and what art's gain's benefit of them?" you must go and go a long journey with your lover. Sit close to yourself to him, and you will find the complications are not constructed so as to place a cruel strain between you. What you want to bring him to is the day or break of promise point, and thus put an end to an engagement which for aught you know to the contrary, might otherwise be suddenly terminated by his unexpected death, just as you were approaching the unhappy "self" period. It's you have hitherto failed to do, simply for lack of using the conditions. It has become so natural for him to see you at home and walk abroad with you, that he goes on wavering and procrastinating even the day of that one day is as good as another, and two or three years make very little difference. Hence it becomes necessary to bring some new and potent influence to bear upon him, and it is this moving force which the railway company supplies you with. We cannot explain it any more than spiritualists can explain psychic, but that it exists you will presently see from the outward manifestations of our two mediums.

Whether it is owing to the unspeakable seclu-

sion of such a situation, or whether it can be traced to the sensation of being hurled through space at forty miles an hour, and the consequent conviction that life is too short to trifle any longer, or whether it may be solely ascribed to the mysterious effect which a second-class compartment lined with American leather is known to produce,—we may well leave to the decision of scientific men, when the great principle receives that careful investigation which its importance demands. It is sufficient for our purpose to recommend the weary spinster to try the experiment for herself, and if, having done so, she finds her lover does not reciprocate, she may rest assured that he hasn't a spark of electricity in his torpid body, and had better forthwith hook on to another. If, on the other hand, he does show signs of quickening affection, the decisive moment must come, and when it's all out there will be the additional gratification of finding that the shock is not half so bad as if it had taken place in some other sequestered spot. There will be a little gurgling like Catherine's, but it will only last as long as it has taken us to write this explanation, for we are coming to a full stop, merely be-

cause the transient agitation of Gribble is wearing off, and she is going to speak.

"Really, sir, I cannot think you're in earnest. It must be a dream. Our acquaintance has been so very short."

"Bless my soul, have we not known each other for hours?" urged the impetuous Wilfred. "What more would you require? Such love as mine can never change; never, dear Kitty; believe me, never."

"Ah, you are too good!" was the flattering response; "but what would mother say?"

"Why, my dearest, she would be delighted, and if she wasn't, why, confound it, what's the odds; are we children? are we — Look here Kitty, it's no use beating about the bush, I must and will marry you, or I shall be broken-hearted, and wander about the world a hopeless and miserable man — think of it, Kitty, — a hopeless and miserable man; think what it means. British brandy — delirium tremens — raving madness — six-barrelled revolvers!"

The sudden application of the silken handkerchief, after this stirring speech, gave Catherine a

moment's breathing time, and she made good use of it by making up her mind at once.

"It need not come to that, sir," she murmured in a low tone, which contrasted vividly with Wilfred's fiery eloquence. "I should feel myself a hypocrite to hide from you any longer the happiness your proposal has given me, but——"

"No buts," broke in the passionate young man; and then, with immense feeling, he added, "You're mine, you're mine Kitty, for ever mine!"

And it is really difficult to say at this juncture that Catherine attempted to deny this thrice-reiterated fact. Certain it was, however, that the next words that transpired were, "let us seal the holy compact with a kiss;" and we think there is no doubt that the rich peach-bloom of Kate *did* respond to the bright prawn-colour of Wilfred in the most graceful osculation. And not being quite sure how long the performance lasted, we would have gladly closed this chapter at such an interesting confirmation of our labour, but the railway authorities had predestined otherwise.

For, sad to relate, directly the train had dashed through the "Economic Funeral" station, the sud-

den application of the brakes startled our loving couple in particular, and all the other passengers in general. We naturally suppose the osculation must have ceased before this took place, for Wilfred's head and a considerable part of his trunk (not his luggage) were soon out of the carriage window.

"We are lost," he shrieked, in the sharp agony of terror!

"Oh, what'll become of us?" cried Catherine, falling down on her knees to pray.

People always take to praying when there's nothing else to be done.

"What'll become of us, my darling? why we shall be dissected into a thousand pieces; there's a horrid goods train crawling along in front, and I don't think our driver sees it."

Did intelligent reader ever hear of an express that was *not* preceded by a luggage train?

If the Directors failed to adopt some measures of the kind, the redundancy corrective would fall to the ground.

"They always load the goods waggons with those infernal combustibles. I can discern the hideous little metal barrels. We're lost,—we must jump out of

the carriage window or we shall be burned alive," shouted the terrified Wilfred, in frantic alarm.

The peach-bloom on the fair Gribble vanished, an ashy pallor stole over her lovely features, and the face that but five minutes ago was radiant with affection's smile, had now sunk back in unconscious stillness.

A fearful moment it was for Wilfred. He could not collect his presence of mind, he was dazed, jolted and bewildered. But something must be done. He could not see the divine Catherine, *his* Catherine, whom he had honourably wooed and won, perish without an effort. On resolving this, a thought immediately struck him. He had bought a shilling railway key.

"Catherine, my Catherine, there is hope, awake, we are saved, we can open the door, stand on the steps, and jump quietly off just as our engine strikes the luggage brake-van." Wildly, desperately, he tugged at his pockets, but the key was not there!

"O my dear angel, we are lost again, I cannot find it. I cannot find it. The train's going forty miles an hour, the other train's only two hundred

yards ahead. God help us! We must jump out. Let me push you through the window first."

Poor Catherine only shrieked, and went off a second time, whereupon another thought immediately struck Wilfred, the shilling key was in his other vest, the other vest was in his portmanteau, the portmanteau was in the luggage-van, and nought but death seemed to remain, so he forced his head out of the window in grim despair.

Oh, the dreadful anguish of that moment, the awful suspense, the fearful consternation!

On speeded the train, however, heedless of signals which seemed to beckon it to destruction. Everywhere there is howling and confusion, but still the wheels madly revolve, and show no signs of slackening. In the adjacent fields the horses snorted and fled, also the cows vanished rapidly, with uplifted tails, which latter sight is always an omen of terrible danger.

The very sleepers seemed awake, and sent up the kindred dust into the eyes of the distracted Wilfred, as if to remind him what he was coming to. The railway chairs danced a revel also, to suggest spiritualism, and the whistles were enacting all the horrors of a pig-fair.

But the train has passed the "Burial Service" Station, and the wretched man is resolved to die manfully, with his arm round the taper waist of the beautiful and now sorrowful Catherine, when just as he is arranging to do so, something sharp and cold drops on his head. He looks up, and behold some kind Samaritan in the next compartment has dropped them a key through the lamp orifice. Imagine his unspeakable joy, as he seizes hold of the humble instrument of present salvation. Picture to yourself the activity with which he most likely opened the door. Think of the relief he must have felt in *not* having to die with his arm round the taper waist of Catherine Gribble!

Fortunately, by this time the brakes were acting, and so eventually Wilfred and his bride alighted in perfect safety. It would have been very awkward if they had been killed before we got to the next chapter. So we are delighted to record their narrow escape, although, to say the least, it looked very droll to watch a train full of living people pull slowly up at the "Necropolis" Station.

From what we can gather, it appears they had been timed to come into collision much earlier;

but the express was accidentally late, and the luggage train had been putting on steam, so, to use the porter's expression, they merely "kissed buffers." Wilfred found as he expected, on examining the trucks, that large quantities of petroleum and other latent caloric, had been stored in the most likely place to receive the first live cinder from the express locomotive.

According to the evidence of one of the guards, the Directors have very strong objections to partial calamities, which only shake or slightly injure the passengers. It is found the latter are both troublesome and litigious. The mishaps that are least expensive, are those which are most complete in the destruction of personal identity. To adopt a familiar illustration, we would cite a pot of London jam. Even a clever analytical chemist might fail to discover what particular kind of fruit it contained. He might, perhaps, however, be satisfied that the ingredients were such as to warrant him in saying that the generic term fruit would apply to most of them. And further, his opinion might be strengthened by falling across a stray stalk or an isolated stone. So in a coach full of mutilated

humanity. After being skilfully crushed, and then subjected to the action of fire and explosive combustibles, a jury might be justified, on examining the product, in coming to the conclusion that the original contents belonged to the genus homo, but the mere fact of finding a bone here or a ligament there, would not enable them to individualise, and label this or that remain with the name of its owner. The advantage of such a difficulty to the Company must be obvious.

Besides, you will now understand why the Railway Boards are so anxious to have cemeteries on their lines. The Directors are wonderfully far-seeing men. They deliberately squeeze the life out of you first, and then char and disfigure your corpse, if, in fact, they do not consume it altogether. But should it happen that they are defeated in this, and some few remains are left you by the merciful interposition of Providence, it will be found they still cling to them with mercenary tenacity. Your affectionate relations may gather them together in a decent coffin, and perchance shed a tributary tear over them, but not so the Directors, they will simply levy a special tariff on the box as it goes sorrowfully to the yawning grave!

Well, thank goodness, they have been disappointed on this occasion at all events, that the returning peach-bloom is again fast mantling on the cheek of the fair Catherine Gribble, also the bright prawn colour in the complexion of Wilfred Wildblood.

Seated once more in a second-class carriage, they proceed along the local line to Splynter Junction, but this time not *alone*, so the spell is broken, and the chapter finished.

CHAPTER II.

THE ENTERPRISING VILLAGE OF COCHINCHINA.

IF we have been able to open this story with any show of dexterity, we may now, perhaps, venture to claim the breathless interest of the reader in some fragmentary particulars concerning the birth-place of the beautiful Catherine Gribble.

Having regard to the recent ordnance survey and other reliable sources, we find the charming little village of Cochinchina is situated about three miles and two furlongs from Splynter Junction.

It is a very thriving place, and the enterprise of the inhabitants may be gathered somewhat from the fact that a two-wheeled omnibus meets every train, and that the average number of passengers by it is three, including the driver. Owing to the large increase of traffic, we are informed the Great Burnham Jolt and Surgical Anatomy Line has now decided to permanently run one train there every twenty-four hours. Previously travellers were only set down, by informing the guard at the last stopping station of their desire to alight.

The village itself was perhaps the only one in England that could have produced so fair a flower as Catherine Gribble, and this was attributable to a marvellous combination of circumstances.

In the first place, it nestled in a rich alluvial vale, and was sheltered on all sides by rugged hills, varying in altitude from ten to twenty feet above the level of the sea ; hence you will realise how it came to pass that the peach-bloom thrived on Catherine's cheeks—peaches, you know, do not grow on lofty mountains.

In the second place, there was no wild chaos of intersecting streets, no sharp corners, no Pickford's vans,

no rude clatter of paving-stones, and no disquieting scramble for life and limb, so that the inhabitants could walk abroad and sniff the life-giving oxygen without being taken to Charing Cross Hospital. Thus it was the serene and confiding expression of tenderness in Catherine's countenance had grown apace, and that her features were free from the anxious puckering of a Metropolitan maiden.

In the third place, the village was straggling, and it is an æsthetical axiom that nothing was ever picturesque that wasn't straggling. Your eye did not go staring down an endless straight line of discoloured compo, with an east wind on one side, and tooth-ache on the other, relieved only by a woe-begone cabby waiting at number 918.

Ah, no, good reader, these were not the beauties of Cochinchina. Here you would see the clean white cottage, decked in its summer clothing, looking bright, warm, comfortable and happy—not black, cold, grimy, streaked and naked, for the villagers were too modest to have anything naked. Further on you would espy the dear old tavern, with its swinging sign-board beckoning you to try its frothy home-brewed nut-brown ale; and beyond

that again, comes the inevitable smithy, where the poetic name of Smith was first forged so many years ago, despite the intervening y and final e. And mark you, we have only enumerated something less than half the village, for there were several other houses more or less important, and all delightful to gaze upon. Besides, we have not mentioned the Saint Pancras and Black Diamond Canal which flows under the bridge, through the turnpike, and where the eye may often catch a glimpse of the noiseless messengers of commerce, as they glide softly past, and the ear may often be soothed with the gentle accents of the polished "Bargee," as he sits on the stern of his boat speaking in the most affectionate manner, now to his wife, now to his horse.

Surely, then, if outward beauty educates the taste, we have described enough to convince you that Catherine Gribble must of necessity have been peculiarly beautiful, especially about the eyes.

And now, in the fourth and last place, we think it is well we should inform you something of the religious and moral advantages of this happy village of Cochinchina.

As you walk up towards the inn—and we naturally assume that is one of the first places you would visit—you will perceive on your right an ancient, square-towered, tumble-down edifice, standing, or rather crumbling, in its own grounds. It is surrounded by a gruesome host of weeping slabs in various stages of decay—that's God's house. A little way off you will be able to see through the umbrageous trees (you should never use trees in a novel unless they are umbrageous) a splendid, square, modern-built mansion, with Gothic decorations about the windows, and a complete opulence of stone and stained brick dressings from base to roof—that's the rector's house. You will admire the neatly trimmed fences, and perhaps go and peep through, to look at the velvet croquet lawn, and luxurious contrivances for temporal enjoyment, which will gladden your heart so much as to make you long for the acquaintance of the hospitable owner. We believe he has a bottle of the choicest Madeira in the peaceful village of Cochin-china, and, bless him, he does not mind bringing it out now and then for your delectation, if you stick closely to the sacraments.

But that is not the point. What we want you to know is that his congregation in summer time is frequently upwards of twenty, and even in wet weather, when the soul is sometimes given to spiritual fasting, the worshippers are seldom less than seventeen or eighteen. Well, if you do a little cyphering, you will find that a stipend of £700 per annum divided by these figures would give in round numbers an average of about £35 per head all told.

Now, the farm labourer in these parts is well fed. He gets twelve shillings a-week. Never mind his wife and children, for we have left them out of the above calculation. Well, twelve shillings per week is about £31 per annum, so if you are not very dense you will be able to compare the figures and see our drift.

If the annual bodily sustenance of Bill Haycroft is amply provided for by the outlay of £31, surely his soul cannot be impoverished, when it has devoured its £35 worth of eternal life.

Thus, again, we say, is the superiority of Catherine Gribble over your London girl made manifest, for she was a member of that large con-

gregation from the age of fourteen until she was nearly twenty-three, and we confidently challenge Tyburnia, or Mayfair, or Belgravia to bring forth a rival so overflowing with moral excellence, as to have consumed more than £300 worth of heavenly manna in less than nine years!

Now, perhaps you may not think so, but we will record it, nevertheless, that we have derived much satisfaction from being able to demonstrate so forcibly that our heroine was at this early stage a woman of most unexceptionable character. And bearing in mind this fact, was there not much reason why Wilfred Wildblood should have been a proud man as the omnibus trundled along with its happy cargo from Splynter Junction to the peaceful village of Cochinchina on this present evening in July?

Of course, Catherine was on a visit to her aged mother, like a proper person as she was, and as we have said, Wilfred was travelling in the grocery line, and meant to drive on the next morning to a neighbouring town where customers abounded.

What assignments were made when his newly acquired treasure alighted, what bright hopes fore-

boded, and what further osculation took place in the growing dusk, may well remain in abeyance until we require to allude to them again, should it ever be necessary for the elucidation of this history.

But there was one small incident that cannot be passed over so lightly, because it betokens, in some trifling measure, the progress this match has made towards a serious termination.

As the smiling Catherine stood, purse in hand, ready to proffer the willing driver his well-earned sixpenny-fare, it was a treat to see the indignation of the gallant Wilfred as he started forward to take the pecuniary burden upon his own shoulders.

"If you would not insult me," he exclaimed, with an ardour that could only be compared to the sacrifice he was about to make, "you will allow me to discharge this obligation for you."

The inoffensive Catherine did not wish to insult him, and so she allowed him to discharge it accordingly.

Now this incident, however unimportant it may appear, has much more than sixpennyworth of value attached to it.

like every other fiction writer, we
in manner of digressions (intending
to crowd these pages with them),
succeeded to dress up a self-evident
story from that simple fare. Be-
lieve us, that we have no other object or
aim on this occasion, than to provide our
readers with two or three finger-posts, or land-
marks, coupled with the instructions con-
tained in the last chapter, may be found extremely

perhaps, we should convey a better notion
of meaning by saying, that we are anxious to
assist the love-lorn maiden with a sort of steam
engine, whereby she may ascertain, within a degree
of what amount of prospective marriage pres-
sure is working in the bosom of her admirer.

And if you will, we dare say, have come to
the conclusion, after what we have already revealed,
that a very small modicum of this motive power will
enable a man to walk out with you in the
fields, or streets, or parks. He wants amuse-
ment; you are pretty, and chatty, you charge him
with the cost of your society, and the places we have
mentioned are free; so he gets his entertainment

for nothing, and very often means just about as much. But it is very different when the pressure has risen to the voluntary paying point, and here you will do well to keep the following axiom green in your memory.

It is a remarkable fact, that when an Englishman is seized with a desire to pay a woman's travelling expenses, he means business; as, for example, the case just related of Wilfred manfully forking out his dear Catherine's sixpenny bus-fare.

And with a Scotchman, we have no reason for saying that the adoption of the great principle would not in like manner indicate his serious intentions, although it is true he is often led to pause a little, from the characteristic prudence of his race. It would not, however, detract one iota from the force of these remarks, because he would, at most, expostulate with the driver, a moment, after this fashion: "Why, my gude mon, was it sax-pence you said? Nay, mon, sax-pence is a large sum o' money, here tak a fourpenny bit, an' gang awa' wi' you."

And again, with an Irishman, we fancy the rule would hold good. He would exhibit all the warm generosity of his nation, and outstrip the other two,

Not satisfied with paying the fares in full, he would offer in addition to "trate" the driver to a good "sthiff" glass of whiskey, and after searching his pockets, would probably find he hadn't "a divil of a copper left."

And as we are wandering somewhat adrift, and speaking of nationality, we will just leave our corollary in lavender awhile, and indulge in a little justifiable vanity. Being entirely a personal matter of the author's, the editorial "we" must be relaxed, or the remarks might get mixed up with the story.

I am a Scotchman, with the blood of Mac Somebody circulating in my veins. I believe that illustrious ancestor had the privilege of meeting a glorious death, and that in his last moments he evinced his gratitude, at having been permitted to die with half a yard of cold claymore in his lumbar region.

It is not surprising, therefore, that I should admire the race with a passion that is only equalled by the love I bear my neighbour.

Well, *my* Catherine Gribble knows this, and I am in consequence thereof placed in a very awkward dilemma.

In vain I preach to her of the great physical, moral, and social attributes of my countrymen, which enable them to show the world that degree of endurance, which can *earn the most and spend the least*. She pooh poohs all that, as unworthy of a thought, and insists upon my wearing the Highland dress in a most populous and idly curious neighbourhood, otherwise she declares I am no Scotchman worthy to lead her, with orange blossoms, to Hymen's altar. For a long time I battled with her prejudices, and thought there was some hope of success, but alas! my troubles have now returned with tenfold intensity, and I am almost brought to wish, notwithstanding my strong objection to sumptuary laws, that the authorities would prohibit the costume altogether, as it was a century and a quarter ago. As I am penning these lines, she is at me.

The great Louise-Lorne epidemic is raging, and she has caught it from her shoe-buckle up to her neckerchief. She has deluged me with highly coloured portraits of the amiable and accomplished couple, and I have joined her in wishing them much joy, adding that as we have started them so well in life, there is no reason why they should not be very happy.

"Well," says she, "if Her Most Gracious Majesty is an admirer of the Highland costume, why should not you be so, when you have everything complete?"

"I am emphatically an admirer of it, my beloved darling," I reply with much warmth; "but the costume is inconvenient for a man of business."

"Nonsense," she says, with something like ineffable contempt on her pretty pouting lips, and then by way of continuing the irritation, she follows it up by singing "The Campbells are coming."

"Of course they are," I say, wishing to change the topic of conversation. "And if it is any comfort to you, they are always coming, and mean to come. And so far as I can judge of the good sense of my comrades, I don't think they'll ever be returning. At least I sha'nt, but still that's no reason why I should make myself conspicuous."

Well, the upshot of it was that she went away in a huff, and I thought the best mode of ending this chapter, was to treat a little of my own troubles, and devote the rest to the business in hand. Perhaps, therefore, she may see the error of her way, when she reads the following eloquent diatribe in print.

It is intended mainly for her benefit, but the ladies in general may pick up the crumbs by the way.

It is well, I think, that people living in large cities should have some notion of what I shall call intramural decency, for what would be perfectly suitable and harmless in a Scottish glen, may not be quite the thing in Rotten Row.

Now, it is a matter of everyday experience, that if the court took to chewing betel root, pricked marine devices on its arms, and hideously tatoored its face, there would be no lack of followers in England, or perhaps elsewhere.

Hence, it has come to pass that because the queen is an admirer of the Highland costume, and because her daughter has honoured a countryman of mine with her hand, that not only the object of my special choice, but every woman in England has become infected with the coatee, kilt, and bare-leg mania!

Do not, I pray you, get the idea into your head that *I* am a bit prudish. I have thrilled with excitement often enough, to see my fine noble muscular brethren in their picturesque costume, on their native hills. It looked natural there, and I

warmed up to red heat in admiration, but not so in a large city. Besides, my dear ladies, only think of the difference.

A stag may appear natural enough in a mountain pass, but who would ever think of putting him in Fleet Street, either actually or on paper.

Again, the bagpipes are quite in keeping with a wild romantic country, and an elastic atmosphere, but who, with any sensibility at all, can listen to them in a narrow street, without feeling an intensely disagreeable vibration of the nervous system, if, indeed, he does not find it absolutely necessary to have recourse to medical treatment. Cease then, I beseech you, to go crazy after Tartans and kilts, for it's an idea capable of great modification, and looking at what you have done with bonnets during the last few years, God only knows where you would stop !

CHAPTER III.

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE GRIBBLE FAMILY TREE.

MR. GRIBBLE, père, when he lived, earned a scanty subsistence by cobbling, and when he died he

ended his existence by drinking. He made it a rule to save something, however small, every year of his life, and he made it a practice to spend it soon afterwards, in the same careful and regular manner.

He was mourned and lamented by a large and influential circle of friends in the usual way, and he was buried by contract for three pounds ten, payable by instalments.

Although his career was necessarily somewhat humble, it was by no means a purposeless one.

The man who gives to the world a syren as fair as Catherine is deserving a better fate than fell to the lot of poor Gribble, and so we cheerfully add this one tablet to "the short and simple annals of the poor."

Mrs. Gribble, mère, is a stout and thrifty woman, with a well-rounded contour, and of fair muscular development. She is not exactly gifted with showy blandishments of the polite and polished school, but she is altogether a genteel and well-conducted person.

She had a neat and dapper appearance, wore a

milk-white apron, and owned to being some years older than her daughter.

Her departed husband, like many of his humble colleagues, was not wanting in the faculty for multiplying and replenishing his species, and had left her pledges of affection sufficient to atone for the entire absence of any provision for feeding them.

And this circumstance almost provokes the reflection whether the arrangements of nature or man are most at fault. Wherever we travel we find the artisan is never wanting in mouths, but generally scanty in his larder, whereas the rich man is often languishing for an heir in spite of his lavish profusion of creature comforts. There is certainly something wrong somewhere—perhaps this novel may put everything right everywhere.

At any rate it is pretty plain the good dame Gribble had been faithful to the trust which her deceased husband had so kindly reposed in her, otherwise we should have been unable to present to the reader such a paragon of perfection as Catherine her daughter.

Yes, it must be admitted the old lady had

brought up her family, with credit to herself and considerable advantage to her offspring.

Among the few worldly belongings of the poor widow, was the pleasant little cottage in which Catherine was born, for it was settled on her when she married Gribble deceased.

Thus you will see our heroine was not without expectations wherewith to gladden the heart of Wilfred Wildblood.

The property was generally considered to be worth £150 at least, and it was only mortgaged for £130, so if you add the law expenses, and divide the equity of redemption by six, you will be able to estimate the value of Catherine's reversion.

It is only in this simple way you will be able to gather some insight into the ingenuous and unsuspecting nature of our heroine, for be it recorded in her favour, she never once dreamed of suggesting to Wilfred the propriety of having this fortune settled upon herself.

We are the more rejoiced at this, because we need not introduce any conveyancing parchment into these pages. We do not care to go wool-gathering in legal quagmires, and we think, by the

way, it would not be amiss if some of our contemporaries would first pass their productions through the head of an attorney, before misleading an easily misled public.

But to return to the old lady, for she was always spoken of as such, by her own family.

It is more than probable you may have been led to conjecture, how it was she found means to rear and educate her family in the very praiseworthy manner we have indicated. Well, we will show you as briefly as we can.

When Gribble deceased had entered into *post mortem* happiness, it was clear something must be done by his relict to win bread for the half-dozen hungry Gribbles left to her charge, so she had recourse to the worthy rector, who at once set to work to help her.

He earnestly exhorted his congregation to start subscription-lists, and wrote to local papers soliciting aid for the old woman and her family. The charitable villagers of Cochinchina responded nobly, and a nice little sum was accordingly raised. To this latter amount the good rector would also have contributed something, but was precluded from

doing so by the unselfish and generous impulses of his nature. This may, at first sight, seem paradoxical, but we can assure you it is capable of the most reasonable solution. He saw, with heart-felt satisfaction, that it gave his flock unbounded pleasure to participate in so good a work, and he would not, therefore, deprive them of such legitimate and holy gratification.

"Truly enough, I envy them," he would say, with a smile of resignation on his placid countenance, "for 'it is far more blessed to give than to receive,' but then," he added, with something more of contentment about that smile, "I should not be doing my duty to check the flow of benevolence in others by giving largely of my own goods. Nay, it is a pastor's duty to show becoming self-abnegation."

Be that as it may, there was a sufficient sum raised to start the Gribbles comfortably in business, and here you will recognise another strange coincidence, when we tell you the shop was positively in the retail grocery line! It is very marvellous how these things do happen, and when you consider that but a few hours ago the prawn-com-

plexioned Wilfred, and the peach-bloom Catherine were in the wide, wide world, unknown to each other—that now they are met, and apparently destined to part no more—it is prodigiously curious that they should both have derived their previous sustenance from the same line of business !

Well, so it was, and for many years, at any rate, the little shop did an excellent trade, and Widow Gribble was able to send her children to school, and generally to bring them up according to Cocker.

Unfortunately, however, her success was the means of suggesting competition, and one evil day a shop was opened just opposite to hers, which had the double effect of reducing her profits, and taking away some of her custom.

It was under these circumstances the cottage became mortgaged, and poor dame Gribble passed many an anxious and sleepless night, wondering where she must next turn for help.

At length the solution of the difficulty came to her, and we think we have authority sufficient for stating, that it was vouchsafed and finally settled in a vision. So, to put it rather poetically, one might sing :—

“She had a dream, a happy dream,
She dreamt that she'd a mangle,
A thing to her more useful far,
Than bracelet, gem, or bangle.”

Aye, gentle reader, the answer to the problem was a mangle, and a week had scarce succeeded this midnight revelation before the new undertaking was carried out.

Again the widow laid her sorrows before the rector, and again he helped her. He not only promised her all his own laundry work, but as much more as his influence would obtain.

Curiously at this juncture, old Betsy Soap-bubble, who possessed the only mangle in the place, had such an attack of rheumatism as to unfit her for more work.

She had long been thinking of retiring from business, and now resolved to do so, making known her intention to the Gribbles, when she came for her little bit of snuff.

Here was the tide then, and the widow saw it, and made a contract.

The business, the mangle, and all were to be assigned to her on condition that she should supply

Dame Soapbubble with some what we might call extra-parochial luxuries, when that worthy took up her abode in the poor-house.

This mode of purchase may seem to some a rather speculative one, but nevertheless it turned out a most profitable venture for the Gribbles, as poor old Betsy had scarcely broken into her eighth packet of snuff, when she took her last pinch, to the great grief of the Board of Guardians and the local ratepayers.

Now we very much fear our candour in mentioning the mangle, may draw down upon Catherine some supercilious contempt from those who never enjoyed the privilege of turning one; but we think we can show you that it is a business which ought to take a very high rank. You have heard that "cleanliness is next to godliness," and if you are gifted with much discernment, you cannot fail to see that smoothing out clean clothes must perforce be in the immediate neighbourhood.

And we may well add for the benefit of certain fashionable young ladies, that a mangle is not to be despised from an educational point of view.

Much that is attractive in Catherine is decidedly

owing to her early occupation. You may go through a great many gilded salons to find such a well-rounded and sinewy arm, such a fine open chest, and such a healthy complexion, and we apprehend these qualities are not without their value to the coming generation.

Far better, we should say, than pale, flaccid, nerveless limbs, in which the life-blood is rebuked if it should dare to travel that way, and box after box of pearl and violet powder flung in its eyes, until at last it seems to retire in disgust, and, by way of revenge, congests about the vital organs.

We are not ashamed, therefore, of Catherine and her early associations with the mangle. We like not wheezing lungs, pulmonary decay, or sluggish liver, and the only hope that we can see for the delicate and ever-complaining daughters of Britain, is to deduce a moral from these remarks. *Do not let your parents rest until they have bought you each a mangle.* Cosmetics and enamel never yet produced a Shakespeare, an Oliver Cromwell, a George Stephenson, or a Michael Faraday; but sturdy biceps and strong mental culture judiciously

combined, might still call forth a race of physical and intellectual giants that would astonish us.

Not, that we would have you imagine we are entirely insensible to the refining influence of music and the fine arts, but we have got an idea that it is a mistake to murder the body for sake of the mind. You can always get more healthy music out of a sound instrument than a cracked one, and hence we have been led to the conclusion, that a substantial mangle may sometimes infuse more vigour into the seeds of posterity than a crazy old piano.

CHAPTER IV.

MATERNAL SCRUTINY (*ante-nuptial*).

WHEN Wilfred reached the Inn after parting from Catherine in the last chapter but one, he was in a happy state of excitement.

The Cochinchina district was new ground to him, and it was by sheer accident he was asked to take it. How he chuckled and crowed, therefore, to find it so pleasant may be easily imagined, especially by those who have ever had occasion to

chuckle and crow themselves, when anything has turned out better than they expected.

Hitherto the journey had been taken by the junior "governor," as Wilfred called him, but of late years he did not seem to relish the trip, and whenever one of the travellers happened to be home at the right time, he generally managed to shift the job on to his shoulders.

Now the gentlemen who had preceded Wilfred were unanimous in their condemnation of the round, as, according to their dicta, not a "line" worth transmitting was to be had out of it.

Well, as far as the truth of that went, Wilfred was of course blissfully ignorant, not having yet made a single call, and we are very much inclined to think we might add, he was profoundly indifferent at this moment whether the report should prove true or not.

When a man has been basking in the smiles of a Catherine Gribble for the space of a long journey, has, moreover, made a proposal and been accepted, it is only natural to suppose he would have some difficulty in concentrating his thoughts on groceries.

"No, by George," said Wilfred, as he frisked about the commercial room in a very uncommercial manner, "I don't mean to bother my head about samples and sales until I have made it all safe with my lovely charmer."

And, indeed, we do not blame him. Such base considerations as commerce and money getting are unworthy to enter the lists with the finer feelings of love and affection, unless perchance the exercise of the first becomes essential to the successful furtherance of the second.

But, as we have seen, Catherine is not a girl with extravagant expectations, and we may safely assume that Wilfred has a few snug pounds put by for an emergency.

Thus you will perceive we are enabled to place before you an instance of pure unadulterated love without a tincture of mercenary alloy. We are the more proud of this because the idea has got abroad, that the ancient institution of marriage on merits is on the wane, while our mission is to prove beyond all doubt that it may be permanently revived through the simple medium of a second-class railway carriage lined with American leather. If we

succeed we think you will allow our pen has not been taken up in vain.

It would have been practically impossible to have produced such a degree of fermentation in the feelings of any two people by the ordinary method, for you must know love-brewing, be the ingredients never so ripe, will have its time before it comes to a head.

Perhaps at this point, then, you will make a note of the fact, and write ingenuity against it for our benefit.

Meanwhile, we will redeem our promise, and reveal some particulars concerning that assignation, to which a passing allusion has already been made.

Wilfred, poor man, could think of nothing else. The two intervening hours seemed to him like as many years, or probably we should be nearer the truth, if we were to say centuries !

Long before the time arrived his appetite had vanished. And we should imagine that those who have ever dined at a commercial table would attach some weight to this fact. It is only right to say, however, that, in the present case, the dinner hour

was passed in the journey down, and our hero was not therefore beset with the usual temptation. But little he cared about bodily refreshment of any kind. It is true, he ordered tea and something to eat, but when he came to sit down he thought of nothing save the one absorbing passion. We know of a certainty he had not more than a pound of beefsteak, a couple of boiled eggs, a small plate of hot muffins, and a modicum of bread, which, to our mind, seems a fearfully scanty repast for a commercial traveller, after a journey. Well, love will have its fling, and so we fear there is no other alternative, than to let Wilfred keep his appointment with an empty stomach.

There is at least one consolation for those who watch these manifestations with a curious eye, and we suppose it may be regarded as one of the great compensating laws of nature. Possibly you may have observed, that whenever love deprives its languishing victims of the desire for *food*, it largely increases their vanity for *clothes*. It was undoubtedly so in the present instance, and we think we are in no way departing from precedent, if we

assume a right to generalise from one well-established case.

Happily for Wilfred it was his wont to enwrap his body in showy, and maybe, some would deem, rather loud habiliments, although it would be hard to impeach his taste, and declare them unbecoming.

A man who has a complexion no brighter than a skin of lard, may wisely content himself with modest colours and small patterns. It is in the highest degree commendable for such an one, if needs be, to don the glossy black rather than seek prominence in gaudy attire.

But the bright, prawn-coloured features of Wilfred demand to be set off with more character, and it is pleasing to find the owner thereof is not insensible to the fact.

We believe it had almost become a proverb on the road, amongst fascinating bar-nymphs and envious chambermaids, that Wilfred Wildblood simply meant a well-dressed man.

If you consider, then, that on this occasion he strained a nerve to make himself, if possible, more prepossessing than ever, you will agree with us that

his appearance must have been somewhat dazzling. As for Catherine, she was, perhaps, not in so much need of extrinsic ornament, although, strange to say, she had been doing little else than "furbishing up" since her arrival.

She had not resided in London for years without acquiring a Metropolitan taste for dress, and, as the fashions go, we are not prepared to complain of their unsuitableness to her healthy and well-developed form.

And here it may be well to explain, that our heroine has been for a considerable time in a shop in the Borough. How and when she got transplanted from her quiet country home to the busy centre of transpontine commerce, she may, perchance, reveal to us in the course of this inquiry. *Ad interim* you will please to wonder.

One praiseworthy trait in her character, however, may be recorded now for the purpose of elucidation. From some source or other, which is a mystery at present, she had managed to send home such substantial assistance to her mother, as to render unnecessary the continuance of the laundry branch of the business, and so we find the old

woman in very comfortable, if humble, circumstances. Her children are mostly out in tolerably good positions, and the mangle has been re-assigned for the muscular development of some other rising family.

When Wilfred presented himself, he was conducted into a very snugly furnished little parlour on the right by the youngest member of the family. The introduction was simple, but to the purpose, and was in a voice that betokened no weakness in the lungs of the speaker. This was perhaps necessary, because it had to reach the old lady in the back premises. "Sharp, mother!" shouted the voice; "Kitty's young man's in the parlour."

Wilfred naturally smiled on hearing this, but he was country-bred himself, and could appreciate the open bluntness that seldom has recourse to the diplomatic whisper.

The widow was soon in the parlour, and made very little ceremony of the new comer by embracing him in a manner which he was willing to bear for the sake of her daughter, although such an ordeal would have slightly astonished Mrs. Refrigerator, of Pimlico.

"My daughter has been telling me you'd be a-coming," she said, by way of opening the conversation.

"Yes, Mrs. Gribble, and I have no doubt she has also informed you of our mutual attachment. I fancy it is the correct thing to ask the mother, and I suppose you will not interfere with her happiness."

The old woman looked at him very hard, and we can tell you it is not an easy thing to go through such maternal scrutiny.

But Wilfred bore it manfully, and when he thought she had had a sufficiently reasonable time, he ventured to repeat the question.

"No, sir," she said, slowly, "I wouldn't step betwixt you, but wouldn't it be a little better if you know'd each other somewise?"

"A hundred years' acquaintance would not alter my opinion," replied the ardent young man. "I should choose your daughter out of ten thousand other girls, wherever they might be."

These astounding figures seemed to convince the old woman, for she paused a second time, apparently to make another inspection.

"I think you might just stop a twelvemonth," she said, again resuming the topic. "Me and my poor husband, who, God bless him, has been buried a long time, kept company for twice two years."

"But, my dear lady," said Wilfred, with a blaze of intelligence in his countenance, "you forget that railways have been invented since then. If you travelled at six miles an hour in your early days, we can travel at fifty now. Divide one by the other, and it would only leave us a few weeks' courtship, which I suppose is necessary."

This startling arithmetical problem at once put the widow in a fog, and she thought there must be something in it. At all events she abandoned the protracted courtship argument with modest resignation, and had recourse to another tack.

"It's very true, sir, as railways is invented and things isn't as they was, but natur' doesn't travel by steam, if man does. Still that's nother here nor there, an' I only wish to say as a young man never knows what a mother's feelin's is until he gets children of his own, you see."

Wilfred replied that he was not prepared to

deny the truth of that assertion, and so the old woman jogged on.

"My dear Kitty" as been a good child to me as ever breathed on earth, an' 'll make a rare trim housewife for anyone as is lucky enough to wed her—but," and here the widow applied her apron to her eyes, "I cannot bring myself to part with her so hurried like."

Wilfred was a little puzzled what answer to make. He knew that mothers generally cried to part with their daughters, but seldom allowed their grief to frustrate a desirable match. At length vanity came to his assistance, and assured him that no woman in her senses would endanger the chance of her daughter marrying a Wilfred Wildblood, particularly if he travelled in the grocery line, and so he spoke out boldly.

"You see, Mrs. Gribble, we're both rather warm—I mean Catherine an' me—and what I always say is, there's nothing like striking the iron while it's hot. Only put two pieces of iron together when they're at white heat, and the devil himself won't hammer 'em asunder."

At this juncture the other piece of iron entered,

as if to demonstrate, by her presence, the force of Wilfred's remark.

"Ah! you *are* come," she murmured softly, and in a tone of feigned surprise that he should have kept his promise.

"I should think I *am* come, and the only wonder is I didn't come an hour ago," replied the irrepressible Wilfred, casting a glance at the widow which seemed to indicate, that he should have no objection to her leaving them alone.

But the old lady was far too happy to think of such a thing, and sat there with a face beaming an ocean of maternal fondness. If indeed there was a shadow, it was a very fleeting one, and may have been occasioned by a retrospective sigh for Gribble deceased.

"Well, what have you and mother been talking about?" inquired the blooming daughter, addressing her beloved as ingenuously as if she hadn't heard every word of the conversation.

"About courtship, my dear," said Wilfred, in a winning voice.

"Courtship, indeed!" said the lovely Kate, with arch simplicity. "A nice topic, I must say, to talk

"Oh, for shame, you silly man!" modestly interposed Catherine. "How can you sit, if you are walking?"

"Of course not, my love, but you know what I mean. Look how happy we were in the railway-carriage. People in the shop can see us here."

"And pray, why should we be ashamed?" enquired Catherine, archly, who, if truth be told, was rather proud of it.

"Ashamed, my love? Bless your pouting lips, if needs be, I would not mind kissing you before a theatre full of people, every night, for a month. Gents in our line don't suffer much from diffidence, and I only propose a walk because it seems altogether more natural."

"Well, I think you men generally get your own way, and so I suppose I must put on my bonnet," said Kate, in a manner which did not betoken much unwillingness.

"Nay, put on that saucy little hat, love. You look so uncommonly well in it."

She blushed, and protested she did not believe him, but she put it on all the same, and they sauntered forth.

And now let the muses be invoked, that we may write what followed with an inspired pen.

CHAPTER V.

AN EVENING STROLL ON A TOW-PATH.

A RETIRED nook, half embosomed in a wild green hedgerow, sweet little primroses peeping out slyly at the intrusive moonlight, a pyramid of newly-stacked hay for a scent-bottle, behind, and a deep placid stream of water for a mirror, in front, ought surely to have about them a poetic ring, fanciful enough for the daintiest lover's ears.

Yet all these, and more, were common to the happy villagers of Cochinchina.

Stretching away for miles, crossed here and there by an old-fashioned bridge, flows the canal, to which we have already alluded. The Tow-path was the grand promenade for everybody on Sundays and holidays, but on week-day nights the stillness was seldom broken save by the mutual murmurings of meandering couples, the occasional braying of an erratic donkey, or the quiet admoni-

tion which generally accompanies the crack of a bargee's whip.

It was hitherward, that Catherine and Wilfred wandered, on this particular night, and the sweetly perfumed air was again pregnant with declarations of reciprocal affection, gentle whisperings of sweet confidences, and—the serious discussion of several very important arrangements.

“They call this the ‘Lovers’ Seat,’” said Kate, in a honied voice, as they approached a primitive looking contrivance, that may have been intended for that purpose by our venerable ancestors, who were not very fastidious about these matters.

“’Tis a strange creaky looking concern,” replied Wilfred, “but suppose we try it. You must be getting desperately fatigued, what with our excitement in the railway carriage, and one thing and another—”

“Oh dear no, I’m not tired,” murmured Kate, “I could walk for miles on such a night as this, only my boots do pinch me just a trifle, so if you don’t mind, we will sit down a few moments.”

“I shall be delighted, my dear; ’tis not every day that a fellow has a chance in such a heavenly spot as this. No wonder they call it the ‘Lovers’

Seat,' although it's a little bit hard, and not quite free from nails, I find."

"That wasn't why it came to be known as the 'Lovers' Seat,'" said Catherine. "There's a sort of legend attached to it. Ever so many years ago, two lovers were seen sitting here, as you and I might be, one moonlight night, and—the next morning their corpses were fished out of the canal, just above there."

"For goodness' sake, don't talk about fishing out corpses," cried Wilfred, shuddering at the thought. "If you do, I shall draw closer to you every time, for I am awfully nervous."

Unfortunately, Kate could not think of another instance that moment, but she would have liked immensely to have assured him that he couldn't be too nervous for her, only her native modesty forbade.

"Be sure and let me know when you are tired of this place," urged the sly little puss; well knowing she was only extorting a compliment from the too willing lover.

"Pray don't stay longer than's agreeable," she added, and then deliberately eased her left boot,

and seemed to settle down as if she was not likely to be in a hurry to go.

"Agreeable, did you say? Oh, dearest Kitty, how could you doubt it! I could be happy on the top of Mount Vesuvius, if you were by my side. Do those sweet little boots pain you very much?" he continued, with an air of great concern.

"Only the least bit in the world," murmured the charmer. "There is an abundance of room as you see," she went on, darting her right foot forward in the most provoking manner, "but they catch me just across the instep here;" and by way of illustration, she spanned the tight place with her thumb and fourth finger so gracefully, that it made a very marked impression on Wilfred's plastic disposition.

And we must say that the present costumes are rather trying for a man of prawn-coloured complexion.

Being phlegmatic, however, we can admire them with comparative safety, and do not mind saying, therefore, that we like the natty short skirts, with their enchanting tucks and flounces, the bewitching little boots that paddle under them, the graceful but puzzling panniers and lappets that cluster round

them, the ingenious and arm-enticing bodices that make up the second story, and the perplexing head-gear that o'ertops the lot. But a few years ago, one never knew whether a woman had a neat ankle or not now ; one can safely conjecture, that a long dress is only a curtain drawn down when there is nothing attractive to show.

Wilfred must have been in the midst of some such rhapsody as this, when a chiding voice said, "Don't be so ridiculous."

"Why, my dear love, it's a fact," he replied, "and the fashion would have come in long ago if every lady had possessed as many charms as you do, Kitty."

"Nonsense, Mr. Wildblood ! You men are all alike. You must either be praising us up to the skies, or else beating the lives out of us, when you have got us in your power."

"How can you call me *Mr. Wildblood* ?" said the lover, purposely disregarding the rest of the remark. "Am I not now your own dear Freddy ? Only fancy how nicely the names agree—you are my darling Kitty, and I am your beloved Freddy."

"But there's time enough for that," said Kate

as the colour mantled in her cheeks. "I don't think it's quite proper just yet, so you'll please to keep your distance."

"You foolish, dear little minx, what are you talking about? I've known people over head and ears in love, ten minutes after their introduction."

"Oh, if that's the case, I don't mind," said the accommodating and innocent Catherine; "but I think we oughtn't to be too free and easy the first day."

"Never fear, my beloved angel. When a man's intentions are strictly honourable you may give him any license in his tongue. He never says what he doesn't mean, and so as he sticks to his professions, it matters little whether he 'calls his darling Kitty or Catherine."

"Perhaps you may be right," said the fair one, resignedly, "but I don't think you're always to be trusted."

"Nay, you shan't say that," urged the passionate Wilfred, as his sinewy arm encircled her taper waist, and gradually drew her towards him. "Come, now," he continued, taking her hand in his, "do you think your beloved Freddy could behave un-

faithfully to one who is absolutely necessary to his existence?"

"Time will show," she quietly warbled, without making the least effort to release herself from the comfortable position in which she was placed.

"And a very brief time it shall be," said the young man, with a gentle pressure which sent a thrill of emotion through both of their amative systems, and we believe accomplished more towards abbreviating this interesting chapter than a whole hour's small talk would have done.

"Yes, my own sweet Kitty," resumed Wilfred, when the agreeable sensation had subsided a little, "I mean to start first thing in the morning, and get my business done in the shortest possible time, after which I shall rush back to London, go straight to Doctors' Commons, take out a license, and we'll be married in no time, without a mortal bit of fuss. Isn't that the right way to do it, eh, my own duck?"

Thrill number two was introduced at this point.

"I always thought it was usual to ask the lady first," answered Kate, after the last mentioned sensation had exhausted itself in a deep sigh.

"Of course, yes, it never struck me," replied

Wilfred, with another gentle turn of the thumb-screw. "As a fellow said in the commercial room the other night, it's the lady's prerogative to fix the day of execution when a man's to be led to the halter. Suppose we say this day week; eh, my love?—or is it a few days too long?"

Here a further thrill ensued, but it didn't seem to act as well as the others, for Catherine broke out in a loud musical laugh which made the welkin resound again, and it's a well-ascertained fact that female cachinnation is sudden death to sentimental manifestations. If you doubt this important theory, or desire fuller information, you will find it fully treated upon in Baron Von Fribbelstein's learned treatise on "The Psychological Manifestations of Moonstruck Meanderers," with observations on their treatment and cure, vol. xxvii. page 841.

Yes, we repeat, the welkin fairly resounded again with the provoking laughter of the merry syren, until poor Wilfred began to imagine he had struck a wrong note, and yet everything he had said before seemed to come very natural to the girl.

"Why, my dear Kitty, whatever are you gig-

gling at? I was not aware that I had said anything very funny."

"Well, upon my word, you are a droll man, and no mistake," said Catherine, still laughing. "Who ever heard of a lady getting married a week after she was engaged? You must be joking, Freddy; why, what would poor mother say?"

"My precious pet lamb, there are scores of cases where parties have married on the spur of the moment, without changing their clothes—run off to Gretna Green—got spliced in Jersey at midnight, and lots of contrivances."

"Really, honour bright?"

"Yes, my love, I assure you 'tis so."

"Well, if that's the case, perhaps I might manage it in ten days, but mind I only say, perhaps."

"You're a jolly brick, on my life, you are. I never met a girl like you. Come, now, just one kiss, to show how happy we are, and another—"

"Hush, I hear a voice, listen!"

"Oh, it's nothing."

"I say it is—let me go—listen!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp, a crack of the whip, and

"Gee up, wilt 'eh!" become audible. Then a barge glides through the bridge, with a woman at the helm, then a rope dips into the glittering water and scatters shining crystals on the tow-path, and then the apparition vanishes as it came.

It was the barge "Juno," silently gliding towards St. Pancras with a precious cargo of black diamonds, won, maybe, at the cost of lives, destined, no doubt, to radiate from Metropolitan caskets, and perchance to illumine happy faces—but how seldom to suggest a sympathetic thought for those who burrow under God's earth, who spend their lives in sable tombs, far away from the bright sunshine, so that we may live comfortably on the surface.

"I told you it was nothing," resumed Wilfred, after we had finished the above reflection. "What need we care for a stray barge?"

"I believe the man was grinning at us when he passed," urged Catherine, "and I don't like to be looked upon as a softy."

"Well, my sweet one, suppose he did. He doesn't know us, and has forgotten all about it by this time. At any rate there's no reason, now he's

gone, why we should not make ourselves comfortable again, so give me your dear hand, and snuggle up close to me, while we discuss the arrangements for the happy day."

It is only fair to Catherine, to say that she was too diffident to follow up these instructions. She remained perfectly passive, and thereby removed the onus of snuggling on to the shoulders of Wilfred. It's the way of modest, retiring maidens—they leave the sins of commission to the bolder sex, and, when quite agreeable, they limit their own iniquities to sins of permission. The result may be the same, but the hiatus in the moral standard is terrible to contemplate. Apply it to murder, and you become the aggressive Cain, and she the innocent victim, Abel.

Well, when they had got into shape again, Wilfred was the first to disturb the solemn stillness.

"Only fancy, my love, in ten days we shall be one!"

"I don't know that," murmured Kate. "You forget I only said perhaps, and that I have not asked mother yet."

"Oh, bother your perhaps, and as for your

mother, you know what the Scriptures say about leaving your parents and cleaving unto your husband. Fancy, my darling!—husband Freddy—wife Kitty, and all the rest of it. I'm sure I shan't sleep a wink for the whole ten nights."

"And knock yourself up, I suppose," said the far-sighted maiden. "A nice figure you would look going to church after lying awake for nearly a fortnight!"

"Well, of course, I don't mean that exactly. Still, I shan't sleep soundly, I shall be dreaming half my time of Kitty, and I shall be starting up in the night and thinking of that railway accident, and furnishing, and a whole jumble of things, until at last a nightmare may come, and then for a certainty I shall behold them fishing our lifeless corpses out of this canal, after which I shall jump out of bed in desperation, seize hold of the towels, and waking, wipe the big drops of cold perspiration from my forehead!"

"I think you'll find it much more comfortable to lie still," said the ingenuous and naive Catherine. "It's foolish to go and upset yourself for nothing."

"The active brain of a Wildblood never yet

slumbered until its chief aim had been accomplished. You, my lovely Kitty, are my chief aim, and when those long ten days are gone, and the law has made you mine for ever, my brain will become so placid that I shall scarcely know I have one."

This last recital was rather wasted on Catherine, for she was making a desperate effort to work on her boot again, which, in her present fetters, was a task of some difficulty. When it was achieved, she suggested in the quietest manner that it was time to return; but we do not fancy she meant it.

"Return, my chicken, without making a single arrangement?" exclaimed Wilfred, clinging yet closer to his treasure. "Look here, sweet love, where shall I write you when I leave this neighbourhood? To-morrow, alas, will place miles between us."

"I shall stop with mother for a week, and then go back to Mr. Poplin's, in the Borough," replied the happy girl, much pleased that her admirer was coming to something definite at last.

"And where shall we marry?"

"At the parish church here, of course."

"Very well, my love, anywhere. And where shall we go for the wedding jaunt?"

"If it's not too far, I should like to go to Gravesend," was the modest reply.

"Suit me excellently. And now, my beloved, where would you like to live? I can't afford a mansion, you know, but there are some sweet little places at Peckham. I lodge there now, and I have seen some beautiful small houses. One in particular, they call 'Sweetbriar Cottage,' Jessamine Lane. Isn't the address pretty?—and you should just see the place now it is in full bloom. You would imagine yourself miles in the country. In front there is a pretty little garden, at the side there is a trellis-work entrance, and behind there's a splendid garden, nearly a dozen yards long."

"I'm sick of cottages in the country," said Catherine, for the first time venturing to differ from the astonished Wilfred, who thought he was painting just the sort of picture to please her. "If I live in anything," she continued, "it must either be apartments or a villa. You're thought nothing of in London, if you live in a cottage."

"Well, my dearest," replied Wilfred, not in the

least disconcerted. "I have my eye on another place in Gingerbread Grove, close by. It is rather smaller than the other, but it is called a villa, and is even more conveniently situated. A station of the South Metropolitan Disfigurement Line is built on the estate, and not two minutes off. Does my charmer think she could be happy with her Freddy there?"

Catherine sighed an affirmative, and then inquired the name of the house.

"Supposing we were living there, my love, your address would be—

 "Mrs. Wilfred Wildblood,

 "Spoonystone Villa,

 "Gingerbread Grove,

 "Peckham,

 "S.E.

"Won't you be proud to scatter that about amongst your friends? I'll bet my existence they'll envy you—and when my companions see what a divine na'ad presides at my tea fountain, won't they envy me?"

Catherine was completely fascinated with the

prospect, although she didn't quite understand the last allusion. She made up her mind, however, to believe henceforth that Wilfred was a learned, as well as a handsome man.

She was of course not aware that he had heard the expression applied to a very pretty girl in a fairy extravaganza, and since that time had assiduously applied it to every charming maiden of his acquaintance.

At this point they were interrupted by the sudden appearance of another barge horse, and, as everything was now settled, they rose simultaneously, and slowly retraced their steps.

When they reached the cottage, they found a smoking hot supper prepared, and the old lady and her daughter were awaiting their arrival with much impatience.

If space did but permit, we might recount what a happy two hours ensued, what radiant faces they all had, and with what relish they consumed the solid good things of this life. Then followed a capacious bowl of punch, which also received right generous attention, after which a pipe and tobacco for Wilfred, which he smoked until it wanted but a

quarter of the midnight chime, and then—oh, how shall we describe it—the parting.

“To meet, to know, and then to part,
Is the sad tale of many a human heart.”

That is to say of many an *ordinary* heart, but reflect what it must have been for two hearts so finely balanced, that on this, the evening of the first day which had brought them together, they are united as inseparably as in any case we know of three months' standing !

Besides, consider that they who have condensed a year's courtship into less than twelve hours, are about to be severed for more than a week !

As twelve hours are to a year, what would it give for a week ?—Answer, fourteen years.

Thus you perceive the magnitude of their emotions would only be eclipsed by two ordinary lovers, of the tortoise species, having suddenly to part for fourteen years and a day ! In making love by steam, we find it necessary to have frequent recourse to figures, for as we have said our language is defective.

Catherine, however, seemed to bear it with great Christian fortitude.

So tried Wilfred, but with less success. Still, hesitation was out of the question, and he tore himself away as best he could.

The door had just closed behind him, and been bolted, when he bethought him that he had forgotten to leave his address. He hurried back precipitately, and on gaining admittance a second time, walked straight towards Mrs. Gribble.

"Mother," he said—

The old dame's heart leaped with joy at this. A woman never reaches her earthly Nirvana until she has been called mother. That's a natural law worth considering, and would not be out of place on the platform of womens' rights!

No doubt the widow had had her full share of such happiness, but, in this instance, it had the additional flavour of denoting something like progress in the suit.

"If I can do anything for you in the grocery way, you shall have the benefit of my commission. I travel for one of the best city houses, indeed, I may boast that Messrs. Pekoe, Hyson, Nibbs, and Co., stand unrivalled for their sweet scented teas."

"Nibbs?" shrieked the old woman.

"Nibbs?" roared the youngest daughter.

"Well; and what of it?" exclaimed the self-possessed Catherine. Then turning to Wilfred, she said, as the peach-bloom assumed a greater depth of colour. "You may well look surprised, Freddy, but this is the most curious place you ever visited. People roar like bulls if they hear a rather curious name."

"Oh, is that all?" returned the unsuspecting young man. "Well, here's a card, and if I can do anything, I shall be rejoiced. Again, beloved, good night. It was worth coming back for—that sweet kiss!"

CHAPTER VI.

MARRIAGE.

IF we should ever present to the world a natural history of our own highly favoured species, we should consider it necessary to dilate, at some length, upon a very prevalent complaint, which, as far as we can ascertain, has not yet been stamped out by the many Christian associations which so abound in this truly happy country of ours. It is highly

inflammatory in its nature, and attacks everybody, great and small, at some period of life, however he or she may endeavour to escape the contagion.

The doctors would most likely describe it as a slow typhoid fever, but, according to our discernment, it is slow in some, quick in others, and certain in everybody.

You may try and smother it, you may dose it with tracts, you may prosecute and imprison it, you may shut it up in penitentiaries, you may flirt with it at midnight meetings, and entice it into all manner of refuges, but you will never annihilate it, unless indeed you make short work of the aforesaid species altogether.

There is but a single specific worth trying, and that is the one which heads this chapter. It is unfortunately true, that it too frequently fails, but it is nevertheless better than all your makeshift nostrums, and while it does no harm, it is mostly productive of a great deal of good. Associate, if you will, to place this potent remedy within the reach of every man, and we will guarantee some heart stirring results, but until you do this, the disease will manifest itself at every street corner, it will break out in

ugly places, and will smoulder and burn in utter defiance of all your great moral Therapeutics, your Exeter Hall Sanitary Commissioners, and your Social Fire Extinction Brigades.

Yes, we repeat the terrible infection will most certainly flourish so long as you imagine that you can put the Bible first and nature second. You might as well expect a catechism to preserve a man from starvation. Surely, you will admit that nature was invented even before inspired writings, and we care not whether you like it or not, we will tell you all the same, that nature will have its fling, though it be at the cost of knocking every Bible precept out of a man.

Show us the individual who has not suffered from this fever, or having suffered from it, has been cured by your pathology, and we will have him fossilised for the British Museum, and carefully preserved as the one human being who miraculously escaped the great plague. If you have been to Knaresborough, we dare say you have seen the famous Dripping Well there. They hang up all sorts of strange animals in such a position that the water can trickle over them, until at last they

become encrusted with a casement of limestone, or some other product, and we fancy they would be delighted to have a curiosity that never felt the pangs of amorous typhoid fever! Besides, inform us how could a more truthful symbol of such an one be better represented than as a limestone fossil?

No doubt you will be astonished, to meet with these reflections in such an out of the way place as a light novel, but we want you to be astonished. It's the only way of getting at an Englishman.

And after all, the subject is not so very irrelevant, when we consider that Wilfred Wildblood has just taken a strong dose of our celebrated specific.

You will have observed, his case was a very serious one, demanding unusually prompt treatment.

And it is a fact that all men with bright, prawn-coloured complexions, are more subject to the complaint than their sallow-faced brethren. Brilliant red corpuscles conduce more to its rapid development than sluggish livers, and hence it is that we have thought it best to get Wilfred married, with as little delay as possible. You will be good enough, therefore, to wish him and the happy bride a fair allowance of joy, after which we will

leave them alone for about three months, before paying a visit to their suburban retreat, in the classical region of Peckham !

CHAPTER VII.

SPOONYSTONE VILLA IN ITS NORMAL STATE.

IN passing silently over the honeymoon and the early marriage days of Wilfred and Catherine, it must not be supposed that we are seeking to hide from the reader any event which could unfavourably affect the great principles we have endeavoured to enunciate. Indeed, everything has gone on so smoothly that we have been deprived of the smallest pretext for an intervening chapter, and we should have been merely trifling with indulgent patience and overcrowded space had we attempted any detailed description.

It is sufficient for our purpose, therefore, to state that all the arrangements, discussed and settled in that eventful stroll on the tow-path, have been triumphantly realised, and that our only excuse for visiting Peckham on the present occasion is to

demonstrate the durable nature of the happiness which first germinates on a permanent way.

To marry in haste and repent at leisure is no doubt the fate of many a deluded human moth, who madly plunges at the first dazzling light he sees, and then falls helpless to the ground, and finishes his existence by meekly crawling after a perambulator, which doubles him up as well as itself ; but we wish to teach such an impulsive insect how he may bask in a woman's smiles to his heart's content, and still keep his wings unsinged.

The only way to accomplish this, however, is to make love by steam, or, in other words, to bring your inert soul up to the level of the advanced state of feminine ingenuity. The reason why that stupid moth gets into mischief, is because the brilliant lights of civilisation are too much for him, and he becomes bewildered and infatuated. So it is with his human counterpart. He sees great piles of Saxon hair and other artificial and subtle devices to palm off the humble gifts of nature, and he loses his presence of mind, simply because the lady with such an overpowering combination of charms, fictitious and real, is too much for him. His unsophisticated

nature wants educating up to that standard which can separate the alloy from the silver, and then calmly decide whether there is enough of the sterling metal to make the bargain one worth having. No doubt this requires a marvellous amount of discernment, especially where a woman has had timely notice of her lover's visit. But it is quite another matter if you unexpectedly meet your future wife in a railway carriage. The tables are turned, and the odds in your favour are enormous.

No woman ever starts on a journey with the idea of netting a husband. The consequence is, that she dons her worst attire, and at most only plasters over any particularly prominent defects she may have. Thus you may survey her as she actually *is*, a privilege always denied to the formal lover, and one which at least enables a man to make a fool of himself with his eyes open, if, in fact, any selection at all would justify so strong a remark.

With such an opportunity, then, we say that a man must be a veritable dolt who rushes into wedlock with an unsuitable partner, and it would be hard to find a single word of sympathy for him. If, on the contrary, he improves the occasion, and, like

Wilfred, makes a prudent choice, there is little fear of his repenting it, and he will most likely discover that to marry in haste, under such circumstances, is to rejoice at leisure.

At all events, that has been the experience of the present occupants of Spoonystone Villa, for if there was within the boundary of Peckham a truly happy couple, that couple was undoubtedly Wilfred and Catherine—and even if there was not in that attractive suburb a couple which might be described as completely happy in every respect, we may certainly claim for them the nearest approach to earthly beatitude ever attained by man and wife.

And there is really no need to marvel at such a result, for while common-place people are wearing out their novelty in long and interminable engagements, Catherine and Wilfred are looking as new and interesting to each other, some three months after marriage, as if they were still in the first flush of the honeymoon, or—the wife had just had some money left her. No matter of fact or cold spousal indifference could be traced in their demeanour, but undying affection, and an unspeakable opulence of

conjugal fidelity, more, probably, than in all the rest of Peckham put together!

And we should like to know the use of all your pageantry, and fine dinners, and sordid wealth, when compared with such happiness as this? Added to it, they would doubtless be very good accessories; but then Wilfred and Catherine wanted for nothing that was necessary to bodily or mental nourishment. Besides, who would say that the enjoyment of the millionaire who dines in cold formality, with his servile flunkey behind and costly *menu* before, is at all comparable with the pleasure to be extracted from a frugal roast and custard pudding, when consumed in a snug parlour gilded with the smiles of Catherine?

Nor, in truth, did Wilfred care for expensive luxuries and costly wines, so long as he could command his limpid bitter beer. A barrel of Burton was far more attractive to him for home consumption than a hogshead of claret; and doubtless there are lots of martyrs to stuckupishness who would gladly fling down their tinted glasses of foreign imposture for a good honest gulp of malt and hops; only, for the most part, they are such poor sheep

that they dare not, for the life of them, confess their natural instincts.

Again, had not Wilfred the chance of an endless variety of British wines at trade prices? You may smile disdainfully at this remark, but you are no patriot to run down your own national productions in favour of Continental vat-wash. Whether or not, it was quite sufficient for Wilfred, that he *liked* these things, and therefore we say he was much better off than all the polite humbugs in Peckham. Mind we do not include in this definition those respectable people who drink wine, beer, or water, out of pure choice. We allude rather to those precious, pitiable idiots who run about protesting they are in the habit of drinking wine, when, as a rule, they are not; who swear with lamentable mendacity, that they like dry wines, when they know perfectly well that diluent treacle would be much nearer the mark. Also, do we refer to that other clique, almost as numerous, which with lying audacity vaunts its well stocked wine-cellar in one breath, and orders its coals in by the sack in the next.

Wilfred belonged to neither of these, and when

he required port or sherry, or any other foreign wine, he never seemed anxious to conceal from his neighbour that he purchased it by small instalments, as did those other two sections of society,—or by what the grocer most courteously calls “sample bottles at wholesale prices.”

And if such habits betoken the absence of a large capital, they by no means indicate anything like a want of comfort—so why be ashamed of them? We are glad to say Wilfred was not. He was content, and envied nobody. There are, no doubt, large houses, possibly palaces, in Peckham, with gorgeous suites of rooms, enchanting conservatories, and endless *et ceteras*. But just ask our hero whether he would prefer to go into one of these with all their attractions, and leave Spoonystone Villa and its priceless contents. We are afraid it would puzzle us to write down his emphatic answer.

And why, forsooth, should he wish to exchange with anybody? His little retreat was not lavishly furnished, but week by week they were adding to their store. If the rich had their Turkey carpets, their Brussels, and their velvet piles—had they not

their Kidderminsters, their tapestries, and their felts?

Certainly the wealthy might boast their grand pianos, their inlaid cabinets, and rich assortment of costly furniture, but Wilfred really thought his home was elegantly furnished with the cut-and-dried suite in green rep, and the modest pianette which stood demurely in the recess, as if half conscious that, it must first go through the three years' chrysalis state before it could regard itself as a permanent fixture—and in thinking so was amply satisfied.

Well now, suppose, after these elaborate comparisons and deductions, all tending, more or less, to place our actors on the topmost rung of domestic happiness, we pay them a quiet visit, and take Spoonystone Villa in its ordinary week-day garb, without fuss or ceremony of any sort—a garb which it has worn by the way from July to October with little indication of getting threadbare.

Whenever Wilfred was at home, and he managed somehow or other to manœuvre his journeys so as to be nearly always there, he dined in the unostentatious way we have mentioned. And although he was in the grocery line he did not

have coffee afterwards, because he took his cup of tea with Kitty at the time of having his chop.

He was very vulgar, we will admit, but still he *liked* being vulgar, and there appeared no chance of reforming him. You will readily see this when we add that the moment the meal was over he pulled out a well coloured short pipe and commenced smoking.

And Kitty was also very vulgar in this respect, for she did not mind her husband's smoke in the least. Perhaps you may think that no loving wife really does. There is, however, a great difference in women, for while Kitty liked it, and was not afraid to say so, she remained where she was, and enjoyed her husband's company with it, whereas Mrs. Affection, being afraid to confess such a weakness, is exiled to the drawing-room to meditate in solitude on the selfish habits of the noble animal, her lord and master.

Well, the next performance is to bring forth the inevitable penny paper which we presume is considered low because it supplies the humblest subject with a fund of amusement and instruction, which, but a few years ago, was inaccessible to the

sovereign ; to say nothing of those astounding miracles of commercial industry, the halfpenny papers. And so they read and chat, and chat and read, until they are almost as well posted up in what concerns their welfare as their betters' only used to be.

Then comes a lull, and Wilfred betakes himself to the green rep couch and stretches out his limbs in idle luxuriance, while Kitty sits down before the pianette and begins to strum the last tune she has learned from the orphan daughter of a clergyman, who retails her musical instruction at a shilling per hour.

It is a very humble performance, with little show of execution, maybe, "In a Cottage near a Wood," or "God save the Queen," or "Luther's Hymn," but we can tell you Wilfred enjoys it immensely, and mainly because it's within his compass, and he can whistle to it, or possibly swell an occasional chord by chiming in.

And here there may be no great harm if we interlard a few remarks on this same subject of music. We shall do so, partly in the interest of the would be popular composer, partly for the

admonition of Mdlle. Fantasia, but chiefly to gratify a spite we have against the latter lady. For, go where you will, in musical circles, you are almost certain to become a victim to fanciful reveries, express-speed warblings, and that eternal "Last Rose of Summer," which has so long since become a thorn in the side of every lover of novelty. At the same time, we can fully appreciate the mechanical ability which can rattle off a brilliant fantasia, and after wandering through a labyrinth of demisemiquavers and executing a sky-rocket cadenza, can quietly land on a crotchet, and pause under its dotted crescent until the breath is fairly exhausted, but we have seldom been able to detect any music there. We are well aware, nevertheless, that a man of refined culture should go into ecstasies about it and declare against the old-fashioned and obsolete semibreve and minim *régime*, when every solemn chord produced a responsive vibration on the human heart-strings, but still we are not prone to ecstasies, and we want the composer to reflect a moment in order that we may ask him a question. Did ever a florid harem-scarem vagary find a home in the national soul?

Did it ever set mankind a humming? You may not think it, but it is an infinitely grand achievement to set all mankind a humming. Only once draw the bow of genius across the universal vocal chords and you have struck the key-note to everlasting fame. Believe us it is worth thinking about.

We remember having the difference between ornamental and heart-stirring music rather curiously illustrated by a very sagacious, but humble, member of the animal creation. This creature was an intelligent, but albeit very undemonstrative, black and tan terrier, which in the matter of expressing his honest convictions, fearless of consequences, we used to place at the head of our limited circle of friends. He never wagged his tail unless he was pleased, and never told a lie for courtesy sake. Well, we have seen this splendid little brute lie still for hours with a sly look of contempt depicted on each side of his sharp pointed nose, while Mdlle. Fantasia has been torturing the piano with her perplexing flights into the region of musical pedantry—but not one sign of approval could she ever extort from her humble listener. Then we have gone to the harmonium and struck

up a few touching and well-sustained chords, perhaps breaking off into the "Old Hundredth" or some half-forgotten chaunt, and it was a treat to see the sensitive little quadruped strut forward, and settle down in front of the instrument, and begin to sing. No words of ours could describe the great volumes of canine emotion which issued from that tiny throat—it was a genuine outpouring of undisguised feeling, such as we might all do well to study. The truth is, he spoke from his innermost heart, while nine out of every ten men do not, and hence we placed him at the head of our select circle of friends.

And to that extent, at all events, Wilfred was like this dog, and however depraved his taste may have been when he found enjoyment "In a Cottage near a Wood," it was at least honest enough to proceed from his heart, and we always think the further we get from this source the more chance there is of our being bored to death by the never-ending vagaries of *Mdlle. Fantasia*.

So let us not, therefore, depreciate the modest repertory of Catherine, neither let us despise Wilfred for confessing himself so easily pleased.

A wonderful difference there is between the rich and poor in this respect : the poor invariably please *themselves*, but the rich go through unspeakable misery for no other object than to please *somebody else*.

Still, withal, we would not counsel you to be poor, but if you have an eye to a comfortable existence, keep out of the way of society's instruments of torture for the weak-minded. Associate with your brethren by all means, but "show fight" if they attempt to stretch your vigorous limbs on the rack, and put on the excruciating thumb-screw of conventionality.

But to return to Spoonystone Villa, for we have now got on to supper-time, and supper is an institution with these people.

For ourselves we have always made' open war against this rest-disturbing meal ; but when we saw Wilfred eagerly devour about twice as much as would satisfy two dyspeptic bodies for dinner, we were almost moved to recant. Verily, we thought to eat food like that, to enjoy it, and to be able to slumber on it, must denote a surprising capacity for animal gratification, which, though

decidedly vulgar, seemed vastly superior to the converse, or the defective feeding capacity. Ye, who with all your valetudinarian self-denial, and abstinence from suppers, do not escape that converse, might do worse than possess this faculty.

Then the supper-cloth is removed, and the inevitable night cap follows, after which the last pipe is charged and discharged, and thus ends another day's cares in clouds of sedative smoke.

The clock has barely struck ten, and London is still ablaze with nocturnal revelry; but Spoonystone Villa is peacefully at rest. Happy people they, who can go to bed and sleep at such a time—innocent of dissipation, indifferent to ambition.

To calmly enjoy nature's sweet restorer, whilst so many of our brethren are lubricating their hearse-wheels with midnight oil, is one of the manifold blessings of obscurity.

CHAPTER VIII.

SPOONYSTONE VILLA IN ITS ABNORMAL STATE.

If you will add a further two months of quiet and unchequered domestic bliss to the last chapter, it will bring this story down to the first week in December, and, at the same time, place us in a rather perplexing situation.

After besprinkling these pages with so much rose water, it is, to say the least, very distressing to have to yield to circumstances which seem to render it necessary for us to change our tune pretty considerably.

And yet, notwithstanding this, we are hopeful of ultimately being able to emerge from what now appear to be difficulties of a very serious and formidable character, in a manner which may, perhaps, after all satisfy poetic justice.

If, therefore, a doubt should arise in your mind that we have given undue prominence to the extrinsic and intrinsic qualities of our hero and heroine, we must ask you to suspend your judgment until you have read our parting words.

Besides you are fully aware that the canker-worm usually finds its way into the fairest fruit first, and the plumpest apricot generally receives the earliest visit from the aggressive wasp. Moreover, we think you could scarcely expect us to leave Wilfred and Catherine blooming away in the serenity of unclouded prosperity much longer, when already they have had five months of such happiness as never falls to the lot of anybody in real life.

Again, it must be remembered that there has been a great alteration in the weather, so you will readily grasp how, even from that cause alone, the whole aspect of Spoonystone Villa was more dismal in the middle of a December fog than it was during the three happy months that preceded the Michaelmas rent day.

No doubt some of the extravagant fervour which illuminated the early part of this story was owing to the buoyant state of the atmosphere at that time, and possibly some of the lachrymose strains, which seem likely to supervene, may not be improved by the opposite state of things.

But, apart from any influence of that kind, it is quite certain that Wilfred is very materially changed within the last week, and however much we may choose to tone it down, there is clearly some deeper cause for it than we are at present aware of.

All that cheerful flow of animal spirits, peculiar to bright prawn-coloured complexions in general, and to Wilfred in particular, seemed to be suddenly checked, and a sad and thoughtful demeanour succeeded. He did not, mind you, exhibit any less affection for Catherine, but when he kissed her it appeared rather to intensify his grief than appease it.

At night, too, he had become restless, and had begun to dream audibly and disagreeably, so much so, indeed, that Catherine had got an idea into her head that there was some woman of the name of Nelly in the plot, and she in her turn became sorrowful and suspicious, thereby making matters still more gloomy.

The only thing that puzzled her was the clock-work regularity which Wilfred observed in regard to coming home, and in her more charitable moods

she would often relent and think herself a brute to malign a good husband by harbouring a single thought of such infidelity.

Still something would happen nearly every day to arouse fresh jealousy, and the consequence was, that she was more frequently found mentally rating Wilfred than trying to exculpate him. She could not understand why he should suddenly want to remove, when he had expended so much time and some money in beautifying their hitherto happy abode.

Neither did it seem quite explainable why he should have become so nervous at every knock at the door, or why he should look carefully about him when he went out or came in.

Catherine knew sufficient of his affairs to convince her that such solicitude did not arise from any pecuniary embarrassments, for, in addition to living and paying the furniture instalments, there was generally a little surplus at the end of the month for investment.

In vain she urged him to confide his troubles to her. He always replied in doubtful accents that there was really nothing wrong; but it is difficult

to deceive a wife so easily, unless you have your facial organisation under such marvellous control that you can make it act the lie, while you speak it.

Well, at length her anxiety became so intense that she wrote to her mother, and requested her to come up, but first asking her to write, as if "nothing was," that she intended to visit town to make Christmas purchases.

Accordingly, the old woman came up, and Catherine and she had many serious discussions as to what could be the cause of such an alteration in Wilfred. There was no doubt about it, for the change so much astonished the old woman that she declared "she scarce know'd the man again," which declaration, we fancy, though slightly stretched, was not entirely devoid of truth.

Of course the mother also endeavoured to extort the secret by all sorts of ingenious flank movements, but Wilfred was impregnable.

It is due to her, however, to say that instead of filling her daughter's mind with a bushel of jealous whimsies, she assured her that no man would

be so affectionate and "reg'lar" if there was anything "unreg'lar" in his habits.

He was possibly suffering from some severe complaint, and did not like to distress or alarm her by confessing it, or he might find married life a little dull, but did not like to say so, lest he might hurt his wife's feelings.

The only remedy, therefore, which the old woman could suggest, was company; the lad was moping, she said, and she knew from experience, that if a man had not society at home, he would probably seek it elsewhere. She had seen the propensity largely developed in Gribble deceased.

"Well, mother," said the practical Catherine, "we can easily see by having a little party while you are here, and if it seems to cheer him up anything like, I will often have one. There's lots of people we can invite; the lady who gives me lessons would come, and she can play beautifully; then there's the people at the fancy stationer's are very friendly with us, and the neighbour next door also, has often wanted us to go in and have a chat."

"Well, as to the folks you'd ask," said the dis-

creet and dutiful Mrs. Gribble, "you'd better leave it to him."

"Nay, mother, I shall just invite them to-morrow, without any fuss, and not say a word to Freddy about it till he comes home. While he is in this state, I'm afraid he might disappoint us."

"Well, lass, do as you please, you know him better 'an I can teach you. By the bye, hast ever told him anything about thy first courtship?"

"No, and don't mean to," said Catherine, with an exultant sort of chuckle. "I fancy, I've managed it famously, don't you think so, mother?"

"Yes, lass; but it's not over well to have any secrets, tho' p'raps its better as it is at present," replied the old woman, reflectively.

"So it shall be, for some time, at any rate," said Catherine, firmly. "I love my husband as well as anybody, but while he refuses to tell me what's the matter with him, I shall not think of letting him know my secret. He's been very sober and steady all along, but one never knows what may turn up."

Probably before this chapter is finished, the reader may recognise a slight prophetic tinge in

the last remark of Catherine. These women do hit the right nail on the head sometimes.

Now, when Wilfred arrived home that evening, he was even more cast down and mysterious than before, and neither the mother nor the daughter could get a word out of him concerning the object of their curiosity. He would talk about anything else, and display the utmost tenderness towards Catherine, but if either of them ventured to suggest that he was not looking well, or that he should consult a doctor, he only smiled ruefully, and begged they wouldn't get such silly notions into their heads, for his health was never better in his life, also alleging that he had been working very hard, to get out the Christmas orders, and that such was the cause of his looking worried. So the night passed away, and he went to business the next morning, little dreaming that when he returned again in the evening, he was destined to entertain as many guests as could well be crammed into the limited precincts of Spoonystone Villa.

As he went out, he again manifested the same suspicious feelings, and looked before and behind him, as if he were conscious that some malicious

enemy was dogging his footsteps, intent on administering a sly blow when he was least prepared for it, but this had now become so much a habit with him, that Catherine merely directed the attention of her mother to it, and afterwards busied herself in preparing for her guests.

Although these preliminaries were necessarily of a very humble character, yet they were sufficiently comprehensive to occupy the whole of the day, so that by the time the friends arrived, Kitty and her mother had only just managed to complete their respective toilets.

It had always been a profound mystery to Wilfred, how his wife managed to spend so much in dress. She never seemed to want for anything, and strange to say, she never asked him for money to buy clothes. He felt satisfied, however, that it was impossible for her to save enough out of the house-keeping allowance for such an extravagant wardrobe. So he frequently expressed his surprise, and mingled his admiration with an enquiry as to where the deuce she found the means, but he was always effectually answered by a kiss, and an admonition that he was to mind his business, and she would

mind hers. And we think he would have been a very unreasonable man indeed, if he had shown any symptoms of dissatisfaction, at escaping from the burden of millinery and drapery on such easy terms.

Just fancy your wife being the best dressed woman in the neighbourhood, and yet at a cost so slight, that you could afford to wonder how she did it! We imagine common gallantry ought to make you attribute the mystery to her excellent management.

As ill-luck would have it, Wilfred returned home this evening more haggard than usual, and when he saw his little abode lighted up from basement to roof, he was completely staggered, and he paused at the threshold in silent wonderment.

"Whatever's the matter, now?" he said, as he glanced cautiously around, and after some hesitation, rung the bell.

He listened nervously, and thought he heard loud quarrelsome voices within, then he grew pale and purple in turns, until what vestige of bright prawn-colour he had left, seemed to vanish for ever. "Great Heavens! I believe it's all up," he exclaimed, as huge drops of cold perspiration came rolling

down his cheeks, and that instant the door opened, and the bright form of Kitty stood before him, in all the dazzling attractions of a new costume.

"Why my darling girl, what for goodness sake is the matter, is the house on fire, or what dreadful thing has happened?"

"Only a few friends, my dear," chirped Kitty. "You have been looking so dreadfully miserable, that I want to polish you up a bit. You're not angry are you dear?"

"Well, not exactly angry, my love. I cannot be angry with you, but why did you not tell me beforehand? I'm too tired to see friends to-night, but—there, I won't make you unhappy, a kiss like that would soften any fellow, so I'll try and do my best. Where on earth did you get that costly dress from. Upon my life, you do puzzle me one way and another."

"Mind your own business, will you," and the inevitable kiss set him at rest, as they had so often done before.

"Now, go along upstairs, and make yourself look smart," continued Catherine. "I've taken out your best clothes, and don't be long, for tea's waiting."

It would take a much stronger man than even Wilfred to resist obedience to such a woman, and so he went accordingly, and came down smiling the best smile he could, which, to say the truth, had a great streak of sadness in it.

But the sight of some seven or eight happy faces was not without its effect on him, and he entered almost gaily into the spirit of amusement.

It is a remarkable feature in bright prawn-coloured men, that they almost invariably forget their troubles, and lay aside their cares in the presence of pretty girls who are just budding into womanhood, or even who have passed that interesting state, so that they have not got too far on towards the leaf-falling period.

Your muddy cuticled men, on the contrary, sit and brood, or at most are only civil and bright enough to escape being churlish. It is seldom, indeed, that they are able to throw off all traces of their grief, even in the presence of the rarest beauty.

So far, then, the chances seem in favour of the little party having the desired effect on Wilfred's spirits.

At tea he brightened up immensely, and frequently glanced with pride at his wife. Then he would mentally contrast her with the other women there, with what result it is needless to record, seeing that we have already tried to convince you that Catherine was the most attractive woman in Peckham.

Among the visitors was a Mr. Paradise, one of the pillars of the local Wesleyan Chapel, which Wilfred and his wife attended, and had seats in. He was a frequent caller, and generally used the opportunity for the purpose of trying to induce Wilfred to become a cut and dried member, while the wife, assuming she came with him, operated on Catherine in the matter of Dorcas Meetings and Sunday Schools.

Some part of the conversation over tea was devoted to these subjects, and the younger branches of the company were not a little pleased when the servant maid cleared away the things, and Miss Crotchet responded to the general request for music. This lady's repertory was as varied as it well could be, which fact may have arisen from the requirements of a very diversified set of pupils

whose parents were of every shade of opinion, those of a religious bent being devoted to oratorio music, and so on, down the scale, to the publican, whose daughter was expected to be prepared with the latest effusion of music-hall minstrelsy and the last new dance tune.

And, as far as we could learn, the latter class of music appeared the most agreeable to the majority of the visitors at Spoonystone Villa. Indeed, when some of the quadrille melodies introduced a snatch or two of a vulgar comic song, there were not wanting those who could put the appropriate words to them. The most notable of these sinners was the host himself, who, in course of a couple of hours, had so relapsed into his normal cheerfulness, as to insist upon Miss Crotchet playing the accompaniment to "Pretty Little Sarah," while he sang it as "Pretty Little Kitty," to the infinite delight of the lady apostrophised, and the marked delectation of her mother, who was inwardly crowing on the great success of her happy thought.

Then followed a host of forfeits and games, the chief and ulterior aim of which seemed to be, to afford bashful members of both sexes a chance of indulg-

ing in that familiar proximity which loadstone nature is always prompting, and which *mauvaise honte* society is always preventing—or, in other words, that which will assuredly take place clandestinely if we obstruct the natural and legitimate enjoyment of the young.

We dare say many of these games were never dreamt of in Belgravia, unless it be in the Mews behind; but still they have an equally ingenious way in that favoured locality of manifesting their feelings under the ægis of lawful amusement. Suppose, for example, you were ushered into a drawing-room, and introduced to a bevy of girls for the first time. Suppose, also, that they are attired in all the diaphanous and low-necked luxuriance of ball dresses, waiting probably for the brougham to convey them to the scene of their lawful games. Well, now, just imagine the awful consternation you would create, if, after addressing a preliminary, "Will you favour me?" to one of these blushing maidens, you proceeded to encircle her tight corset, seize hold of her fair hand, and unceremoniously press her enamel bosom to your own manly chest! Why, good gracious, you would

shake propriety to its very foundation. She would faint, the sisters would declare themselves outraged, the mamma would blow up the papa for introducing such a boor, and the papa would very properly kick you out of doors.

Well, now let us follow that bevy of girls to the ball-room, and go through precisely the same performance there, and what will the consequence be? If you are tolerably good-looking, and have a fair balance at the bank, or, better still, a title of any sort, that same sweet, modest girl, that fainted ere-while, will whisper a welcome affirmative, and you may then place your arm around her waist, and drag her about the room until your dress-coat sleeves are all over violet-powder, and she will endure it without a murmur, and, what is more, appear to enjoy it.

Now, where is the enormous difference after all? Simply this. Society permits that in the ball-room which it trembles to think of in the drawing-room, while Dame Nature, being much more consistent and outspoken, declares it to be very agreeable under any circumstances.

Thus it is that in small houses where there is

no room to dance, they have invented their cunning games. Society is too modest to let young people kiss each other openly and honestly as they used to do in the days of old, so it puts up a screen, and bids them sneak behind it and osculate to their heart's content. And you may depend upon it that same screen is double-sided, and doubly mischievous. It makes your children sly in those things which, being natural, they need not be ashamed of; and it obstructs your vision where a seasonable word might, perchance, avert a disaster.

Well, far be it from us to interfere with any innocent enjoyment, so long as it is innocent, whether it takes place in Pimlico or Peckham; and we confess candidly that it makes us young again to listen to the wild merriment which is now convulsing Spoonystone Villa. It is a great comfort to see healthy instinct triumphant sometimes, in spite of middle-aged cares and artificial mock-modesty. The wonder to us is, that a modern-built residence like this Peckham abode does not figuratively split its lathe and plaster sides as they echo the shrill bursts of laughter which are making the

little room vibrate more than it has ever done before, and, in point of fact, more than it was ever intended to do.

And we are sure you will be ready to excuse Kitty and her mother for indulging in a little bit of legitimate exultation, as they retire to the kitchen to look after the substantial repast which is to crown the evening's entertainment.

"You see, lass, your old mother was right after all. The lad only wanted brushing up a trifle," said the mother, with a self-satisfied air.

"I think you're bewitched, mother," returned the happy daughter. "I've never seen him merrier since we were married."

"Well, mind you keep on, and let him have plenty of company," continued the old woman. "I can see a long way, but I'm sure there isn't a better husband anywheres than him; an' it's only natural as he should want amusement. Your poor father would have it, come what would."

"I shall only be too glad to let him have anything he wants, now we have found out what's the matter," said Catherine; "but it was enough to

frighten any woman to see her husband almost wasting away before her eyes."

"Well, child, be thankful it's nothing worse. Young folks always gets foolish whims into their heads, when they needn't fear a morsel."

"All right, mother ; I'll be as happy as a queen after this, if you'll just put a little parsley round that tongue."

She meant, of course, an ox-tongue, which was destined for the supper-table.

"I tell you what it is, Kitty," slowly resumed Mrs. Gribble, "you'll find the men very hard to manage unless you humours 'em a good deal. It's no use opposing of 'em, for they're certain to beat you in the long run."

"I dare say it's quite true, mother," answered the daughter ; "but still I've had no complaint against Wilfred, except his looking so miserable lately, and now I hope we've found out the way to cure that."

"Yes, lass, we have for sure, at last."

"Now, Jane, have you laid the cloth?" enquired the busy Catherine, as the maid returned from the parlour.

"Yes, ma'am !"

"Very well, be quick and put on your bonnet. I want you to fetch five pints of beer. Let me see, how much is five fours, mother ?"

"Five fours, child ? Why twenty pence, of course. I thought as you know'd your multerplication table better 'an that."

"Well, Jane, you'll want fourpence change. Come, make haste, else master'll be getting cross. Is it raining ?"

"Yes, ma'm, an' freezin', too. It's dreadful slippery in the yard."

"Put on my goloshes, then, and don't get tumbling down with the beer, like a stupid—here you are, so be off with you. And now, mother, you take in the chickens, and I'll bring the ham and tongue."

The old woman obeyed with wonderful alacrity, and Catherine followed.

Then the guests gathered round the table in the best of spirits. Their rollicking fun had accomplished the first part of the adage, "to laugh and grow fat." They had done all the laughing, and were now about to come in for the fat. Wilfred

was in the best of humours, and had adroitly managed to ensconce himself between the two pretty daughters of the fancy stationer.

Catherine's peach-bloom features were radiant with delight. Mrs. Gribble's parchment was glowing with red ink. The countenance of Mr. Paradise was beaming with expectant enjoyment—that is, he looked at the chickens as if they had been birds of Paradise. The usually demure glance of Miss Crotchet had a staccato sparkle in it ; and, in short, everything was as pleasant and cheerful as happy faces and abundance of creature comforts could make it—when there came a rude tug at the kitchen bell, which very nearly snapped the wire.

“What's that ?” exclaimed Wilfred in sudden alarm.

“Nothing, my dear,” said the unsuspecting Kitty. “It's only Jane with the beer. Would you mind opening the door, mother ? I wish she wouldn't pull so hard—p'raps it's because it's just raining a bit.”

“Raining ?” cried a chorus of voices. “How shall we ever get home ?”

"Oh, it's only a little drizzling," said Kitty. "It'll most likely turn to a hard frost before you leave. What shall I give you, Mr. Paradise? any part you like in particular? a leg or a wing, and a slice of the breast?"

"Anything, Mrs. Wildblood, thank you. I'm easily pleased," returned the visitor.

This gentleman had precedence, for two reasons. Firstly, because he was a grocer, and frequently gave Wilfred orders, and, secondly, because, as we have said, he was a great dignitary at the Wesleyan chapel.

"I wonder what's keeping mother!" said Kitty. "What can she be talking to Jane about? I hope the girl hasn't gone and fell down with the beer. Go on carving the tongue, Freddy, dear, while I open the parlour door and listen a minute."

The girl entered at the same moment, and said Mrs. Gribble was only talking to a poor woman.

Wilfred tried to obey Kitty's injunctions, but his trembling hands all at once mutinied, and seemed to ignore the authority of that useful aide-de-camp of the brain, Major Volition. Then, to the surprise of everybody, a deathly pallor stole

over him, and the bright expression of happiness which a few moments ago illumined his countenance, fled like a dissolving view, leaving but a blank look and white space in its wake.

There was little need to put the door ajar, for the voices now grew loud, and still louder, and in another instant were outside the parlour door.

Wilfred started to his feet, as if he contemplated a bolt ; but he was too late, and he staggered back, and sank mechanically on the couch.

Yes, indeed, he is too late, for a strange figure blocked the doorway, and was literally glaring at him through reddish-brown orbs, lighted up with malignant fire, that boded no good.

The apparition was dressed in dark, shabby habiliments, which we suppose were once black, but are now so discoloured as to render that once a very remote period.

The half-frozen rain on her thin garments, exchanged a rapid flash with the gas-light, and vanished before the heat of the room.

Her form was slight, and her face very thin. Her age was about thirty-five. A first glance at her sharp, red nose and pale cheeks, coupled with

the compressed lips, would undoubtedly have given you the impression that she was a vixen and a tartar by nature, but such was not actually the truth. Those sharp lines and acute angles had been chiseled out by privation, as they had in so many other faces besides.

Desperate and malevolent she may now appear, but time was when she had a gentle soul, and her form was not without comeliness when it first became familiar to Wilfred.

Poor old Mrs. Gribble had rushed into the kitchen to recover herself. She could not go in and face the company, but sobbed, and cried, and "took on," as Jane said, most dreadfully.

Inwardly she was mortified that she should have lived to see her beloved daughter married to a man who could be guilty of anything that Gribble deceased was innocent of; but now the shocking time had come, and she had to score a point in favour of the poor old cobbler at last.

In the parlour there never was such a scene. The first thing Catherine did was to give a piercing shriek, and then throw herself wildly into her husband's lap. He, wretched man, you might have

tossed on the prongs of a pitchfork, without his offering any very serious resistance.

Indeed every person in the room, save the grim spectre at the door, was more or less dumbfounded. After a few agonizing moments of breathless excitement, poor Kitty went into the most extravagant hysterics, under the influence of which she seized hold of Wilfred's coat, and rent down one of the breast seams as easily as if she had been tearing a piece of paper in twain.

"Oh, Wilfred, you've deceived me!" she shouted, at the top of her voice. "Who is that dreadful woman standing there?"

Hearing Catherine's shrieks, the old woman gathered her scattered senses, and made for the parlour, where she took charge of her unhappy daughter.

"May I ask," said Mr. Paradise, "what all this mystery means? I cannot think that a constant attendant at our little tabernacle can have been audacious enough to invite us here to meet a lady who has no just title to be called his wife."

"I am innocent," gasped the unhappy host, without daring a glance towards the doorway.

"Innocent, indeed?" said the strange visitor, derisively, in a wiry voice, and speaking for the first time. Poor woman! she had by-gone recollections and feelings to smother, before her tongue could find utterance for present purposes.

"Then, perhaps, this woman will explain the object of this unseemly interruption," continued Mr. Paradise, with a ring of offended dignity about his tone. "If we have not been insulted, why is she here? If we have, all I can say is, that you ought to be horsewhipped out of the chapel, and scouted by every honest man."

"That he ought," readily chimed in the rest of Wilfred's friends.

"I declare I'm innocent," again he groaned. "She is an impostor, trying to extort money."

"Oh, you devil incarnate!" said the spectre, darting a flash out of her reddish-brown eyes, that might well have smote the heart of any man. "On this cold, pitiless night," she went on, with an accent and manner which denoted a good education, "I have stood these two hours outside that window hesitating what I should do. I heard the sounds of merriment, and mingling with them, I detected his

base voice. He is very happy, thought I, while I am here in scanty clothing, already soaked by the chilling rain, with heart almost frozen, and feet wet and frost-bitten. Yet, bad as he is, I will wait until his friends are gone, I thought ; and so I did linger on until, at last, I felt as if death was so close at hand, that I must act at once, if I acted at all. Mercy shown to such a man is only laying snares for other women. I am determined, therefore, to punish him. That I am here to do, and here I shall stay until it is done, living or dead. Pray let me sit down."

Mr. Paradise was up in a moment, and helped the visitor to a chair. She was completely exhausted, although very determined ; and hence her manner was very calm for one who had made up her mind that nothing but the strong hand of the law, or death, should dislodge her from her position.

Poor Kitty began to rave in the most terrible manner, and nothing seemed to have any effect in checking her, but the voice of this strange and unexpected guest.

"And do you mean to tell us that you have any claim upon Mr. Wildblood?" asked Mr.

Paradise, who had now become so interested that he was quite prepared to act as her champion on the spot.

"No ; she hasn't the least," broke in Wilfred, in a tone which seemed to indicate that he felt it necessary to put a bolder face on the matter. "If she doesn't leave at once," he went on, "I'll send Jane for a policeman."

"Send, by all means," said the woman, quietly. "She will only have to go outside the gate, where she will find two waiting for a signal."

"The fiend's going to ruin me," cried Wilfred, making a rush towards the door, and becoming so desperate that Mr. Paradise did not seem to care about tackling him.

"You shall only leave this room in one of two ways," said the little woman, flying to the door—"either over my corpse, or between two policemen ;" and in the twinkling of an eye she had turned the key, and put it in her pocket.

"You miserable hag, I'll murder you !" said Wilfred, almost frothing at the mouth with passion. "Let me go out, will you ? Give me that key, or

by heavens, I'll crush your wretched body to pieces!"

"See, he's going to kill her!" shouted a half-dozen terrified voices, and in a moment the frenzied Wilfred was pulled forcibly away to the other end of the room.

The poor woman seemed the least frightened of anybody. "I should not mind dying," she said, bitterly, "if it would bring him to the gallows."

"Oh, for shame!" shrieked Catherine.

"Shame, indeed!" she continued, in a withering tone. "I will ask these people to look first at me, the lawful wife of that brute, and then at you, the person whom he keeps, and say where the shame is."

"Oh, mother, let me go and tear her eyes out!" said Catherine. "She says I'm not married—oh, the brazen hussey as she is!"

"Be quiet, child. A deal o' use your bein' married is, if that woman's wed 'afore you. A nice mess you've got us into, all along of your not heeding the advice of your mother. You wouldn't stop a bit, like a sensible lass."

"Look!" continued the woman, heedless of

Catherine and her mother ; " this is the dress of a wife ! a tattered old alpaca, grown shabby and dirty and brown, and with a dozen holes for the cold December winds to blow through. Kept-women manage things differently. They can have their warm velvet bodices, braided by such fingers as mine. They can sport their gaudy costumes and embroidered skirts, and then cry shame on the poor wife, who comes, half-starved, to assert her rights, and wish the wretch who has forsaken her the doom he deserves."

At this juncture another violent ringing of the bell ensued, after which the tramp of heavy footsteps was heard in the passage.

Wilfred fairly quailed at the sound, and then again made a determined effort to bound forward, but was prevented.

" The wretch may go now," said the *soi-disant* wife, as she quietly unlocked the door, and asked the new-comers to step into the parlour.

At the sight of the two policemen Wilfred broke down completely. He implored the poor woman to forgive him, and now for the first time called her Nelly.

Catherine was barely conscious when these two other visitors made their appearance ; but when she heard the word, Nelly, she clung to her mother with a convulsive grip, that made the old woman cry out with pain.

"Yes, my poor child," whispered the old widow, "I am much afraid it's all true. Oh, what would your father have said to such a sight as this?"

All the lady visitors were only too glad to escape when they saw the door again unlocked. They had witnessed such a scene as would afford them a topic of conversation for a life-time.

Nelly, however, was inflexible and immovable. She sat there with dry eyes, as the policemen proceeded to arrest Wilfred, and she heard his heart-rending, "Good-bye, Kitty," with grim jealousy.

Both Kitty and her mother had swooned away again, and neither now saw nor heard what was going on.

Mr. Paradise remained, out of sheer pity, and he and the attenuated Nelly were the only conscious people left in that eventful parlour.

They procured assistance, and had the mother and daughter put to bed.

Meanwhile, Wilfred was painfully realising the fact, that a comfortable seat between two pretty daughters of a fancy stationer, with a toothsome supper before him, was a vast deal more to his taste, than being marched, through the frosty, damp night, to a bleak station-house, with a rough and unsympathising policeman on either side of him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FOREGOING CHAPTER FURTHER DEVELOPED.

WE think the reader will now admit that matters are beginning to look rather disheartening. It was not, therefore, without reason that at the very outset of the last chapter we should have deemed it necessary to record some ominous forebodings of impending disaster.

These, and even more, we take it, are now realised, and must be regarded as troublesome facts, calculated to place us on the horns of a dilemma.

Still we would not have you run away with the

delusion that we are losing confidence in the great principles we have endeavoured to enunciate.

The man who feels that he has a useful mission to perform, and who knows that to him is entrusted the propagation of mighty truths, which are foreign to the rest of his kind, can well afford to smile with indifference at a few obstacles which may seem for a moment, to hinder the progress of the work he has in hand.

We are not, then, broken down or desponding, neither are we in the least appalled at the magnitude of the events which appear to throw a transient shade over the bright picture we painted of that first dawn of love in a second-class railway carriage.

Yet we acknowledge, with a due show of candour, that the image is slightly fractured, and we are just a little puzzled where to look for the magic cement which is to join the pieces together again.

That the principle will eventually vindicate itself, however, we have not the least doubt, and so we will humbly proceed with the narrative, fully impressed the while with the consciousness of ulti-

mate triumph, howsoever mysteriously it may be brought about.

As a starting point, you will very likely consider it rather perplexing to have two wives of one man under the same roof, for Nelly had remained at Spoonystone Villa all night, and was, indeed, the only guest who partook of that sumptuous supper, save, perhaps, a hurried snack swallowed by Mr. Paradise before he left. Jane, the servant-maid, as a matter of course, made a hearty meal; but, then, she was not a guest, and, under less favourable circumstances, would have been obliged to content herself with some frugal pickings.

The extreme awkwardness of the situation conferred on her unwonted importance, and she was, in point of fact, the only medium between Nelly, who occupied the parlour, and Catherine, who was raving away in her bed-room upstairs; if such medium should become necessary.

Poor Mrs. Gribble was so overcome with all the excitement and misery she had endured, that she at last succumbed to feeble old age, and sobbed herself to sleep. She had not been without her

troubles, but this one terrible piece of disgrace eclipsed them all.

Thus the wretched night sped on, and the small hours were multiplying fast towards daylight before poor Kitty was sufficiently recovered to realise the actual state of affairs.

Jane had naturally a weary time of it, and needed all the stamina she had derived from her unusual supper to carry her through those tiresome hours of watching.

And it is well she did watch, for in Catherine's lucid moments she became so desperate with grief that there seemed every chance of her attempting some serious bodily harm.

Frequently she would start up with glaring eyes, and, in tones of piteous anguish, cry out, "Oh, Jane, what have they done with my Wilfred? Where is he? oh, tell me is he in the room?" and then she would fall back gasping, "Oh, why did he deceive me thus? he'll break my heart, I cannot bear it, he'll break my poor heart!"

Downstairs, too, Jane could plainly hear the movements of the restless and unwelcome visitor. She did not seem to sleep an instant, and appeared

to occupy a great part of the time in roaming about and opening and shutting doors. All this, of course, added to the poor girl's terror, heightened, as it was, by the dismal surroundings, so that when she imagined she heard the woman's footsteps slowly ascending the stairs, she uttered a wild and sudden shriek, which brought Mrs. Gribble and Catherine to consciousness in the twinkling of an eye.

The poor old woman literally rolled off the bed, and was quickly on her feet, while Catherine started up as if she had been galvanised, and then began to tremble, until the iron framework of the bedstead fairly vibrated.

"She is coming upstairs," cried the frightened and half-paralysed girl; "oh, do lock the door (the speaker dare not stir) or she'll be in the room in a minute, and who knows but she is going to murder us all? The great big carving knife is in the parlour."

The old woman chided her, but nevertheless flew to the door and locked it securely. Presently they heard the parlour door close with a bang, and that re-assured them, and led them to make up their minds it was a false alarm.

None of them, however, were likely to sleep again before daylight, and when Catherine seemed sufficiently calm, her mother and she began to discuss what was to be done.

It was pretty certain they could not all stay in the house together, but how could they get rid of the obnoxious visitor downstairs? If the woman's tale were true, there was little doubt that she had more right to be under Wilfred's roof than they had, and even if false, it was not an easy thing to eject her.

Eventually they came to the determination of waiting the arrival of Mr. Paradise, who had promised to return in the morning. When this gentleman had heard both sides of the question, he very properly divided his pity between the two women, and concentrated all his anger for Wilfred; so he was just the sort of mediator that the occasion demanded.

At the same time, nothing would convince Catherine that Wilfred was guilty. Notwithstanding what had taken place, she determined to befriend him until he was proved to be so. Such is the tenderness of women for men who get them



into trouble. The common-place men, who never plunge their wives into disgrace, come in for a very small share of affection compared with their more enterprising and sinning brethren. Just as a man, who regularly discharges his liabilities, is passed by indifferently on the other side as a simple plodding fellow, who is content to rumble along in a beaten track, while the man who pays a shilling in the pound to-day, and who ten years hence becomes conscience-smitten and pays the other nineteen, is extolled, and probably favoured with a special paragraph in the papers, headed "an honest man." We should not be slow to recognise the honesty in either instance, but, surely, the first-named case is more conducive to the well-being of society than the second, and, therefore, more deserving of the newspaper paragraph.

Mrs. Gribble, of course, enlarged in no measured terms on the enormity of Wilfred's crime, but she might as well have saved her breath, for her supply was not by any means so abundant that she could afford to waste it.

Catherine urged, with a good deal of feeling, that it would be cruel for everybody to desert him

because he was in trouble, and so she gathered herself together, and rose with the first streak of dawn, intending to visit her husband in his captivity as soon as Mr. Paradise had settled with that dreadful woman downstairs.

Guilty, or not guilty, he was to have the best legal assistance which could be obtained at the court, after which she meant to induce a gentleman, who had done her a kindness before, to become bail, if it should be necessary.

And terrible as the situation is, as it now stands, there is still a serio-comic element about it.

Downstairs, wife number one is planning the prosecution, and smoothing out her marriage lines, which the officers had directed her to procure. Upstairs, wife number two is concocting means for the defence, and both will start from under the same roof for the purpose of inquiring which has a legal right to return to it. Downstairs wants a conviction. Upstairs does not. The parlour is jealous of the first-floor bed-room, and, in the interval, Wilfred is pining away in a police cell.

The clock had scarcely chimed eight when Mr. Paradise made his appearance. It was a treat to

see him looking so cheerful and happy. The character of the good Samaritan suited him admirably, so long as it was not likely to impose a pecuniary obligation. He delighted in offering his services in an interesting case like this. Some men are so good and unselfish that they devote a great deal of valuable time to giving advice. They will listen to your misfortunes with remarkable composure, anxious to afford a word in season. And you will often find they are men of singular refinement, hence they are seldom known to wound the most susceptible sensibility by offering anything more substantial.

Such a man was the virtuous Mr. Paradise, and as it happened his services were very acceptable. We regret to say this is not always the case, owing to the proverbial ingratitude of suffering humanity. We believe there is an extreme case on record where a starving man once devoured a penny loaf in preference to a farthing tract, but, thank goodness, our brethren are not all so hopelessly depraved.

At first Catherine implored Mr. Paradise to use his good offices in dissuading the first wife to ab-

stain from offering evidence, but like a proper man, as he was, he rejected the proposal with scorn.

"If Mr. Wildblood be innocent," he said, with a dubious shrug of the shoulders, "he will be acquitted, and there will be no need of propitiating the woman who claims to be his first wife. If he is guilty, he deserves to be punished, not only for bigamy, but for desecrating our little tabernacle, and insulting his respectable friends."

In this view Mrs. Gribble heartily concurred, so Catherine was obliged to abandon her entreaties at once. The mother was very wroth at the outrage which her son-in-law had committed, and there were no extenuating circumstances about it to appease her. As we have hinted, the very fact that it was something which she could not lay to the charge of Gribble deceased, was sufficient to deprive the culprit of her sympathy altogether.

She could, however, readily appreciate the necessity of coming to some understanding as to who was to remain in possession of Wilfred's goods and chattels pending the inquiry, and to that end the conversation then tended.

Mr. Paradise could not well see how the first wife was likely to be induced to relinquish her claim in that respect, however groundless the claim might be.

"The house is tolerably well furnished," he said, "and she may be expecting to realise something out of it, should Mr. Wildblood be convicted. She will, therefore, require a pretty good sum to forego any right which the verdict may give her, and as I presume you have no ready money to speak of, what can we do?"

Catherine looked thoughtful for a moment, and signalled her mother to follow her into a little side room.

Here they engaged in an energetic conversation, but as it was all done in a whisper, the reader cannot expect us to report it.

"Mother and me have been talking," said Catherine quietly, when they returned into the presence of Mr. Paradise, "and we think we could manage to find fifty pounds if that woman would promise, that come what will, she won't interfere with us at Spoonystone Villa."

"In that case," said Mr. Paradise, "you had

better give me pen and ink, and I will just sketch out a memorandum, and see if she will agree to sign it. The best way would be to give her something for present necessities, and promise to pay her the rest when the case is decided."

The mother and daughter assented, and Jane was ordered to get the necessary writing materials.

That task being accomplished, Mr. Paradise proceeded to the parlour, where he found Nelly seated at the table with a lot of papers before her. She had previously fortified herself for her day's excitement by partaking of a further portion of that unfortunate supper.

She received her visitor courteously, and listened calmly to what he had to say.

After a few preliminaries, he explained the impossibility of all parties remaining under the same roof.

"I am aware of it, sir," she said, without moving a muscle (except, of course, the muscles required for the purpose of articulation!) "but I suppose you have not come to persuade me that I ought to starve, while the woman upstairs is living on the fat of the land, at my husband's expense."

"Most assuredly not," replied Mr. Paradise, "and so I have consented to act as a sort of mediator, to put things in a practical shape. You must, of course, understand that I am in no way interested in any of the actors in this sad business, but merely offer my services as one Christian helping another."

"I am deeply grateful to you," replied the desolate woman, "but although I set very little value upon life for its own sake, yet I feel that it would be wicked for me to perish when there is some hope of my being able to procure bread from the source which should have supplied it all along. I bear no malice to the person upstairs, but still I have the first claim, or at least should have."

"Quite so," said Mr. Paradise, "but I want to show you first, that your case, however bad it may be, is not much worse than your rival's. You may have seen that she is a comparatively young woman, and you must remember she has been deceived like yourself, and her prospects are likely to be blasted for life. I suppose you know she is properly married?"

"I am aware she has been through the ceremony," said the woman, with some bitterness, "otherwise it would be little use my going to the court; but as to her being properly married, when I, the first wife, am here alive, I can scarcely agree with you. If you will allow me, sir, I will tell you exactly how the matter stands. I once had a much larger house than this, and it was full of very useful furniture. I made my living partly by millinery and partly by letting apartments. How I came to have such a house does not matter at present. Among the many lodgers who stayed there, was Wilfred Wildblood, and he brought numerous friends from time to time. I was then about twenty-seven years of age, and, I suppose, had some small share of attractions, which have since completely vanished before the misery I have had to endure. One evil day I was foolish enough to receive the attentions of Wildblood, and eventually we were married, as you will gather from this certificate. Well, we lived happily enough together for several years, until he seemed to get into fast company, and then he often absented himself for days at a stretch. From the first he deceived me,

and told me, amongst other things, that he was employed by a firm in the city, which I afterwards found to have no existence. When I accused him of this treachery, he became very violent, and ultimately deserted me altogether. Between his creditors and the landlord, I lost every stick of furniture I possessed, and in the end I was an outcast and homeless. Fortunately I had friends, who were not only better off than myself, but who were willing to support me as long as I chose to accept their bounty. For a little while I availed myself of their kindness, and trudged every day to the city, in the hope of meeting Wilfred, but without success. As I was returning, however, one day, downcast and broken-hearted, I saw one of the friends who had visited us, and stayed at our house after we were married. I told him how I was situated, and he was kind enough to inform me where Wilfred really was employed. Now, although I had been treated so cruelly, I abstained from going to the place, because I feared the exposure might possibly deprive both Wilfred and myself of bread, and so I wrote to him. I had his reply, offering to allow

me a small pittance, which was barely enough to keep body and soul together, but I accepted it, and eked out my existence with such employment as I could get. The monthly allowance came regularly enough until last August, when it suddenly ceased, and I could not get a reply to my letters. Accordingly I went to the warehouse, and, finding Wilfred had gone home, I begged them to let me have his address, representing that I desired to see him that night. After some hesitation, I got it, and, coming down to Peckham, I made enquiries about the place before I could make up my mind to call. You may, perhaps, know the little greengrocer's shop in the main road."

Mr. Paradise assented.

"Well, as good luck would have it, I went in there to buy an orange, to quench my thirst, and I enquired of the woman whether she happened to know a florid gentleman who resided at this house, and what was the name of the people he lived with."

"And what did she say?" broke in Mr. Paradise, with increasing curiosity.

"Why she seemed to owe him a grudge, and

became communicative at once. She told me that both Mr. and Mrs. Wildblood were proud, stuck-up sort of people, and that although the latter could dress in her velveteens, and make a great show, she was too stingy to deal of respectable shopkeepers, and encouraged a horde of costermongers. Hearing a Mrs. Wildblood mentioned, I took the woman into my confidence, and she kindly offered me the use of a small room, in order that I might watch their movements."

"How long is that ago?" asked the listener.

"About four months. During all that wretched period I have been earning a scanty subsistence in the daytime, and watching Spoonystone Villa night and morning."

"But why did you not make yourself known earlier?" enquired Mr. Paradise.

"Because I wished to remain concealed until I could find out where Wilfred was married a second time; so that I might call, prepared to assert my authority, and with materials which would justify me in giving him in charge."

"Then how did you find it out at last?" interposed Mr. Paradise.

"The moment I saw the arrival of an old woman, I concluded she must be the mother-in-law, and the greengrocer being on speaking terms with Jane, the servant here, she ascertained from whence the visitor came. Then followed a fearful struggle to obtain means to go down for the necessary certificate. Nearly every decent garment I possessed was pawned for the purpose, and it was only yesterday I returned, almost starved to death, with this precious document,"—and she handed Mr. Paradise the marriage lines of Catherine.

"Your history is, in truth, a very sad one," said the latter, as he scanned the long piece of paper, and inwardly returned a verdict of guilty against the hapless Wilfred. "I heartily wish I could set everything right, but, for the present, we must be content to make the best of a bad job, and see whether some convenient arrangement cannot be arrived at with respect to this house."

"I am not at all disposed to throw difficulties in the way," said the woman quietly, "but having lost everything in the world, I think I am right in the course which I am pursuing. What do you propose?"

"Well, it appears the furniture here is only partly paid for, and there is something owing for rent and taxes, so the surplus would not be so very much after all. Still Mrs. Gribble and her daughter are convinced of the impossibility of your all remaining here, and as Mr. Wildblood may be committed for trial, some time would necessarily elapse before the case is decided. They have therefore commissioned me to say that if it meets your views, they will endeavour to raise fifty pounds for your benefit, provided you will relinquish all claim to this place, in any event. Are you agreeable?"

"Why fifty pounds would be a fortune to me now," said the poor woman, with great candour. "I will willingly acquiesce in your terms, if you will give me your undertaking to see it paid, and provided I shall not be fettered in the prosecution, also assuming that I can have sufficient now to protect me from immediate want."

"That I think can all be arranged," said Mr. Paradise, delighted at his success. "I have just drawn up a little note of the terms, if you will be good enough to sign it."

"With all my heart, sir," she replied. "I can

assure you, sir, I am grateful to you for making a proposal by which I can leave this dreadful neighbourhood for ever, and get back again to my friends."

"I am only too glad to be the means of doing any good," said Mr. Paradise, humbly, "I suppose," he continued, "that ten pounds will supply present necessities?"

"Aye, sir, if need be, ten shillings," said poor Nelly, who had learned to put a fabulous value on small sums.

"No, my good woman, we wish to deal fairly with you ; but mind, in return, you adhere to your part of the agreement. Don't forget that you have solemnly promised never to return to this house again. The balance of the money can be paid at my shop."

"Ah, sir, you little know what a repugnance I have to the place. Stern privation alone would have induced me to cling to it. I can live in luxury for a quarter of a year on this ten-pound note."

And so the unwelcome guest took her departure for the court, and Spoonystone Villa was once more

in the undisputed possession of Catherine and her mother.

Mr. Paradise further extended his kindness, by offering to remain with the old woman, whilst the unhappy daughter and Jane went to the local police station.

When they arrived there, they found that Wilfred had been taken to the Middlesex side, on some question of jurisdiction, so that they were barely in time to have a hasty interview with him, and engage a solicitor, before he was placed in the dock.

And now, having got rid of one very important difficulty which confronted us at the beginning of this chapter, we may well make a pause for a moment, while the magistrate adjusts his spectacles, and signifies his intention of going on with the case.

CHAPTER X.

THE EXAMINATION AND COMMITTAL.

"MAY it please your worship, I am for the prosecution in this case," said Mr. Browbeeter, with a significant nod to the sitting magistrate, Mr. Credulous Easyman.

"And I have the hawnor to appear for the defence," said Mr. Leechcraft, in a drawling tone.

A slight inclination of the head of Mr. Easyman signified, we presume, that it did please his worship, and Mr. Browbeeter was about to proceed, when the clerk of the court suddenly rose, and whispered to his chief.

"Just so," said the magistrate; and then addressing the attorneys, he continued, "I see there is an undefended case arising out of the arrest of this prisoner, which I will dispose of first."

"As I have been very hastily instructed," said Mr. Leechcraft, "perhaps your worship will allow my client the short interval for conversation with me."

"Certainly," responded the magistrate. "But I do not apprehend we shall be more than ten minutes."

"I will be ready in that time," replied the lawyer, and he hurried away to make the best of the opportunity, or, in other words, to ascertain whether his clients were likely people to find money for an elaborate defence, in which case he would know how to act.

"It's a very serious case," he said to Wilfred,

when they met below. "Have you any money, or have you any relations who will find the means to defend you if the magistrate commits, as he is certain to do?"

"How much will it cost?" said Catherine, who had followed them, and whose eyes were swollen with tears.

"That depends," said the wily Leechcraft; "the more you have, the better the defence will be. Do you think you could raise a hundred pounds?"

"Yes," exclaimed the foolish Kitty, to the astonishment of her recreant husband, and the intense gratification of the attorney.

"But," said Wilfred, "I am innocent of the charge, and can prove the woman was married before."

Kitty brightened up at this, but Mr. Leechcraft found it necessary for his purpose to check her unexpected pleasure.

"You see," he said, assuming an expression of low cunning, "a charge of this serious nature must of necessity be sent to a jury. No doubt the point you mention will go very much in your favour at the trial, and we must manage to get it on the

depositions, but my advice to you now is, to reserve your defence. As we say in legal phraseology, the magistrate has only a ministerial duty to perform, and that simply means, that instead of trying the case himself, he is bound to send it to a higher tribunal."

"But if you manage it properly there would be no case to send," said Wilfred, sullenly.

"Maybe, you would like to conduct your own defence," replied the lawyer, with a degree of offended dignity which was slightly at variance with his greasy black suit.

"No, indeed, sir, he would not," said the too-confiding Kitty, innocent of the important secret that it would have been a positive benefit to Wilfred if the means for an elaborate defence had not been forthcoming.

"Well, I must require you to follow my advice to the very letter, or take the matter out of my hands altogether," said the lawyer, well knowing that the latter alternative was now next to impossible.

"Of course we shall take your advice," said Wilfred, urged on by the anxious demeanour of

Catherine, "but I can't quite see where the money's to come from. I know very well it'll be the ruin of us all, and I've brought enough of misery on this lady without that. I would take my chance, only I am sure to come out guiltless, and then I may be able to repay it."

"Never mind that," said Kitty, bursting into tears. "I can bear anything if you are not in the wrong, but if you are, then Heaven will punish you enough, and I shall be miserable for life."

A policeman came down at this point to inform them that the other case had been disposed of, and Wilfred and Kitty returned to the court with heavy hearts. Mr. Leechcraft, on the contrary, went up with an unusually buoyant spirit, as one who, after much drudgery, had lighted on a valuable nugget of gold.

Now, as the other case had something to do with this, it may be interesting to glance at a report of it, because, if it accomplishes no other end, it may show with what veneration official gentlemen regard the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, when it proceeds from that infallible oracle which lurks under a Scotland Yard

helmet. In such places the *force* of truth is never so potent as when it proceeds from the police force.

The prisoner is a poor woman who lives in the vicinity of Spoonystone Villa, and is charged with assaulting the constables while in the execution of their duty. Let P.C. Perjury tell his own tale.

“From information I received, your worship,” —that’s the beginning of every constable’s evidence. In most cases the prisoner’s response should be, “Good Lord, deliver us!”—“I went to Spoonystone Villa for the purpose of arresting one Wilfred Wildblood, charged on a warrant, issued from this court, with committing bigamy. I was assisted by my mate, P.C. Duplicate Liar, and we found the prisoner very lungous and violent. He tried to get his hands loose, saying as he wanted to get his handkerchief, but we know’d it was only a trick of his to try and run away. Then he became dreadfully desperate, and we had to hold him very tight——”

“You nearly screwed his arms out of their sockets,” timidly interposed the prisoner, who was very properly rebuked for attempting to throw a shadow of doubt on the consecrated testimony of

the force; besides, had they not a right to wrench an arm out of its socket, if, in their unfailing judgment, it appeared necessary?

"Well, your worship, we'd just a got out of Gingerbread Grove, into the main road, when we met the prisoner, who, without any provocation, came up and assaulted me on the left arm so hard that I lost the use of it all night, and even now I feel the place——"

"Oh, you false man!" broke in the prisoner, unable to contain herself; and again she suffered a just admonition for applying such an epithet to a member of such a veracious body.

"Then, your worship, she tried to rescue the prisoner, and if I hadn't sprung my rattle, which brought P.C. Triplicate Liar to the spot, both prisoners might have got away, but he, with a great deal of trouble, took her in custody."

"Have you any questions to ask this witness?" said the magistrate.

"No, your worship; it is little use asking questions and getting lies for answers," said the woman, with much contempt in her tone.

Then the other two constables got in the box,

and, by preconcerted arrangement, swore word for word the same as number one, and ultimately the prisoner was called upon for her defence.

The poor woman replied that the charge was cruel and false from beginning to end ; that she had been kept in the police station all night ; that she had a young family ; that her only crime was because she went up to the constable and patted him on the arm, and begged him not to torture their prisoner, who was crying in the greatest agony ; that they immediately charged her with obstructing them in the execution of their duty, and grossly insulted her all the way to the station, saying they knew her, and had their eyes on her.

"Is she known to the police?" inquired the magistrate, with great gravity.

"Yes, your worship," was the prompt rejoinder of P.C. Perjury. "Both my mate and me has seen her several times a walking up and down Peckham, and looking very suspicious."

"Ah!" said the magistrate, making a note of the fact.

"Oh, the vile wretches!" said the poor woman. "My husband is in court, and half a dozen wit-

nesses who have come of their own accord to help me."

"And I can prove," said a respectably-dressed tradesman, starting out from the crowd of listeners, "that all the woman has said is true, for she was arrested before my shop, and I saw everything."

"Then step into the witness-box," cried the usher—and so he did step into the witness-box, and so did four or five others follow him, all of whose testimony corroborated the simple statement of the accused.

Now mark the decision :

"It appears to me," said Mr. Easyman, "that there is a slight conflict of evidence somewhere ; and, without wishing to impugn anything advanced by the witnesses examined for the prisoner, I cannot close my eyes to the fact that the testimony of P.C. Perjury is confirmed by two other trustworthy officers. It would be idle to suppose that men who have been in the force so long would think of trumping up a case, and I must therefore uphold and protect them in the execution of their duty. I will, however, not inflict the full penalty, as the prisoner has already suffered a night's imprisonment ; but I should be wanting in my duty, if I

failed to mark the case with some punishment. I shall, therefore, fine the prisoner twenty shillings, or seven days."

Now if anybody should consider this an exaggerated sample of a case of interfering on humanitarian grounds with a policeman in the execution of his duty, let him just go up and expostulate with the next officer he meets, who happens to be using an excessive amount of severity in conveying his prisoner to the station-house. If he does not get convinced of his error the first time, let him repeat it until he does, for we would not have him imagine there are no truthful and honest men in the force. People are, probably, too eager to load it with indiscriminate abuse, and that does no good ; but we only wish him to beware of the unscrupulous and dishonest members, of whom there are enough, in all conscience : also to point out the mischief that may, and frequently does arise, from magistrates giving too ready credence to official swearing, and allowing it precedence of other testimony. Mind, we do not allege that they do so from any other motive than a sincere conviction that they are carrying out their

duty; and indeed, on the whole, we are rather inclined to be proud of our stipendiary magistrates. It would be difficult to find in the metropolis a harder-working or a more devoted set of public servants; but our idea is, that until the *morale* of the police force is vastly improved, it is just possible to place too much reliance on its mechanical method of getting up cases, and giving evidence to support them.

We will even go a step further, and express our belief that there are hundreds of men in the constabulary of unimpeachable integrity; but until we begin to see a falling off in false swearing and conspiracy, and less inclination on the part of a magistrate to favour Scotland Yard swearing, we shall still cling to an old notion, that a man with too much liquor in him may do worse by meeting a policeman than by falling across a thief. In the matter of position and character he will at least have the best of the thief; but he will find these of very little avail should he go before Mr. Easyman with the testimony of two constables against him.

But to return to the story.

It is well that poor Kitty did not hear of

Wilfred's yells, or she would very likely have had a more hideous night of it than we have chronicled ; or, perhaps, might have started off and found herself in the same place as the poor woman who has just been fined. Wilfred had since shown her his blue-black arms, for we suppose he knew very well what excellent capital a few abrasions are for doing a lucrative trade in female sympathy.

That it succeeded admirably in the present instance, may be partly gathered from the anxiety with which she regards Mr. Browbeeter, who is at length on his legs stating the case. This was, of course, substantially the same as the first wife's narrative, given in the previous chapter, and need not, therefore, be repeated.

More than once, however, he embellished it with his own reflections ; and, for this purpose, the great contrast between Catherine and the first wife, afforded him a telling opportunity of indulging in several antithetical points which made Wilfred writhe again.

" See," he said, with emphatic gestures, " what a wreck my client is. She was young and hopeful once, until a human monster entered her abode,

and planned her destruction. Not satisfied with forsaking her, and leaving her destitute, he, through his creditors, swept away all she possessed, and she had to wander abroad, a wretched outcast, houseless and homeless. This, your worship, was his first unhappy victim. Now, one would suppose that remorse would have taught any other man to try and repair the evil ; but what do we find in the conduct of the prisoner ? No sooner has he made one home desolate, and reduced a once happy woman to the plight in which you now see my client, than he deliberately and diabolically lays his net to ensnare other victims. But, your worship, the devil is cunning as well as wicked, and this time we find the prisoner practising his infamous games far away from London, and carrying misery into the quiet village home of a poor widow. And here, your worship, he found his second unhappy victim. Like a fiend he went to that humble cottage ; he saw, and alas ! he conquered."

Kitty sobbed like a child at this point, and Wilfred hid his face, as if he were beginning to feel there was some truth in the accusation. Browbeeter, seeing the tears of Catherine, only gathered

further inspiration. In the admiration of pretty women he was second to nobody, although waxing on to fifty-five. When he dies, he will no doubt be eulogized in this matter, as a man whose faculties were unimpaired to the last.

“And when I contrast these two wretched women,” he continued, “it makes my heart bleed to think of them. In the first wife, you have the mere shadow of the woman he solemnly swore to succour, as she appears in tatters, after having undergone the withering effects of years of his brutality. In the second victim, you have a woman adorned with youth and beauty, who has entered into life full of hope, and radiant with feminine attractions, suddenly brought to the brink of the precipice down which my client was hurled so many years ago. As she is now, in all the ripe bloom of early womanhood, so was my client when she first met the tempter; and it is very sad to reflect that the happiness of both lives has been ruthlessly and for ever blasted by the scandalous and unmitigated villany of the prisoner. It is under these circumstances, and after putting my client in the box, and proving the marriages, that I

will ask your worship to commit this man, without bail, that society may be for a little while purified from his hateful presence."

Poor Kitty was so much affected with this powerful peroration, that she really began to think Wilfred was hopelessly guilty, and naturally regretted that she had been foolish enough to proffer a hundred pounds to the enterprising Leechcraft. If Wilfred were sent to prison, she would require every farthing she could lay her hands upon for necessities. So when Leechcraft was about to rise and cross-examine the first wife, who was now in the witness-box, and had finished her examination-in-chief, Catherine pressed towards him, and whispered.

"I find," she said, "on thinking over matters, that I shall not be able to rake up anything like fifty pounds——"

"Are you going to cross-examine this witness?" interrupted the magistrate.

"Yes, your worship, in a minute. My client has just made a very important communication to me." And then, addressing Catherine in an undertone, he said, "You ought to have told me before,

and I don't know that I shall let you off your promise."

"Well now, Mrs. Wildblood," he said, turning suddenly and ferociously towards the witness, "do you mean to say, on your oath, that you have any right title or interest in the name which you have assumed?"

"Most emphatically I do," said the woman.

"She has proved the marriage," interposed the magistrate; "what more would you have?"

"Your worship will see presently. Perhaps you will allow me to look at the certificate put in."

"Certainly." And the clerk handed over the document.

"Now, my friend here has painted a very highly coloured picture of the happy state of youth, beauty, and prosperity in which the defendant found you. Will you tell me first what age you were when you became Mrs. Wildblood?"

"About twenty-eight," replied the witness.

"Well, that's scarcely as young as the second victim, but still it is not old. Now tell me the age of the bridegroom at that time?"

"He said he was nineteen," answered the woman, with some hesitation.

"Exactly," said the lawyer, with a chuckle. "The youth, at all events, was pretty much on the side of my client. You see, your worship, he was but an infant, and not responsible for his actions; but we can well afford to pass over that for a moment. Now it appears from this certificate that when you were married you gave the name of Wilkinson. Is that so, or is it not?"

"Yes!" was the trembling response.

"And that was your maiden name, of course?" said Leechcraft, with considerable emphasis on "of course."

"If you will allow me, I will explain."

"We want no explanation here. Answer the question,—was Wilkinson your maiden name, or was it not?"

"It's nothing to do with this case, and I won't tell you," said the witness, breaking down, and becoming confused, to the great delight of the inexorable advocate.

"Really, your worship, I think my friend is pressing rather hardly on the poor woman," said

Mr. Browbeeter, rising, and looking somewhat crest-fallen at the turn which the case seemed to be taking. "We needn't go into all the antecedents when a legal marriage has been properly proved."

"I submit, sir, that the evidence is not only admissible, but absolutely necessary," said Mr. Leechcraft, with much force. "My friend here has indulged in a great deal of flowery rhetoric for the purpose of damnifying my client, and I think I can show you that the positions of prosecutor and prisoner should be reversed."

"I am of opinion the question is certainly a proper one," said the magistrate, "more especially as it seems to throw some doubt upon the prosecutor's credibility. I shall rule, therefore, in favour of its admissibility."

"Your worship's law is unquestionable," said the triumphant Leechcraft; and turning towards the witness, he said, with renewed vigour, "*Now* tell me whether Wilkinson was your maiden name or not."

"No," replied the woman, doggedly, after being told to answer the question by Mr. Browbeeter.

"Just so. Be good enough to take down that answer, Mr. Clerk. It is indispensable to have it on the depositions. Then, if that was not your maiden name, how came you to get married under it?" continued Mr. Leechcraft.

"I was a widow," said the woman, nervously.

"Precisely. You were a widow, were you? Then the defendant was not the first monster who entered your once happy home? Perhaps you will be good enough to inform us how you became a widow?"

"Upon my word, Mr. Leechcraft, there is a limit to a police-court cross-examination," said Mr. Browbeeter, with immense dignity.

"But there was no limit to your opening speech," retorted the other.

"Come, gentlemen," interposed the magistrate, "I will have no unseemly squabbles here. You may trust to me to prevent any question being asked which is not essential to the elucidation of this inquiry. I think Mr. Leechcraft has already elicited a fact which I would rather have had from the prosecution."

Poor Browbeeter was boiling with rage. He

had often suppressed Leechcraft, but this morning it seemed his enemy's turn to repay his insults with interest.

"Well, now, Mrs. Wildblood, let us know, if you please, how you ceased to be Mrs. Wilkinson, if such a change has really taken place in a legal manner."

"My first husband emigrated to Australia, and said——"

"Never mind what he said—we want no hearsay evidence."

"I must tell you in my own way, or not at all——"

"When did he emigrate?"

"About thirteen years ago."

"Well, that simple fact didn't make you a widow at the time you inveigled my client into marriage."

"But I was going to tell you he was drowned," said the woman, heartily regretting that she had ever placed herself in the witness-box.

"How do you know that?" continued Leechcraft, with a defiant look at Browbeeter. "Did you see him drowned? Recollect you are on your

oath, and that a man's personal liberty's at stake."

"No, but the ship was lost, and I never heard from him after."

"And pray, how came you to know the ship was lost?"

"It was in the papers, and I had a letter from a surviving passenger."

"What papers? Have you got them? and why have you failed to put in that letter?"

"Because I have lost them."

"I should have thought a loving wife would have preserved such mementoes of her husband's death, but, nevertheless, I will take your word for it. Now, do you remember whether all hands perished, or not?"

"I believe about fifty were saved; but my husband was not amongst them, or his fellow passenger would not have written to say so."

"Oh, indeed. I must say that is a most convenient way of arriving at a conclusion when you want to get married again. My friend here has enlarged at some length upon the cruelty of one monster deserting you. May it not have occurred

to you that the first husband was afflicted with the same weakness, and had an accomplice?"

"He was too kind for that," said the witness, as a tear trembled down her cheeks.

"Well, sufficient for present purposes that we have these statements on the evidence. So let us return to your marriage with the defendant, for a moment. Be good enough to tell us how you first came to be acquainted with this monster in human shape?"

"He came to lodge at my house."

"As I supposed! And you knew he was a simple youth fresh from the country, didn't you?"

"I was aware he was not a Londoner; but he was not so simple for all that."

"At all events, you say he proposed marriage, he being nineteen at the time, and you twenty-eight."

"Pray confine yourself to questions," said Browbeeter, rising in great wrath. "You mould them to suit your purpose, and then extort from her all sorts of unguarded answers."

"When I require your instruction I will seek it," replied Leechcraft. "I apprehend his worship

will interfere when interruption becomes necessary. Well, then, did he propose marriage, or did he not?"

"Of course he did," said the witness, indignantly. "Do you suppose it is a woman's place to ask a man?"

"That depends on circumstances. There's more ways than one of doing that; but we will assume for your benefit that he did ask you, and then arises another question. Did you make him acquainted with the facts which I have just had so much difficulty to elicit?"

"My belief is, I should tell him."

"Never mind your belief. Did you or did you not? Let me again remind you that you are on your solemn oath, and I'd have you be careful."

"It is so long ago that I cannot tax my memory, but there's no doubt I told him."

"It is not too long ago to enable you to rake up endless charges against the defendant. Now I ask you, in plain language, did you not disguise from my client the fact of your being a supposed widow until after you were married to him?"

"I cannot say."

"Very well, if you are determined to evade that question, let me ask you another. Was it not because an execution was put in the house by a creditor of your first husband and yourself that Wilfred first became aware of your previous marriage?"

"It might be, but I cannot swear it."

"It might be, forsooth! do you not know it? and further, that therein was the secret of my client separating from you?"

"He might have made that an excuse," said the woman, beginning to feel that her case was hopeless.

"And a very valid excuse too, I should think. Besides, let me ask you whether or not there were any additions made to the furniture by Mr. Wildblood?"

"Yes; a few!"

"Did he not spend nearly sixty pounds in such things?"

"He might have done, but I can't say."

"And these things were left with you?"

"He didn't take anything away."

"And is it not the truth, that the things were

ultimately 'swept away,' as my friend has put it, to satisfy a claim which the defendant knew nothing of before he married you? And that it was really nothing to do with him or his creditors at all?"

"It might have been, but it is impossible for me to speak with certainty."

"Very well, you may step down."

"Now, I think, your worship, I have elicited sufficient to justify you in dismissing the case," said Leechcraft, "and I am instructed that my client has a complete answer to every accusation, should you desire to investigate the matter further. But as the other witnesses to be called for the prosecution will merely prove formal matters, which we admit, I am anxious to save the court any useless waste of time. And yet, as far as we are concerned, I may say, we are only too anxious to clear up the whole case before a jury, although it is my duty to submit that there is not the shadow of a pretence for sending us there."

"Really, your worship, I must rise to order," said Mr. Browbeeter. "If my friend is acquainted with the *modus operandi* of conducting such an enquiry, he must know that his remarks are entirely

out of place, until the case for the prosecution is closed."

"Then by all means close it," said Leechcraft, who really had no desire to offer any obstacle to a committal, but was merely making such observations preparatory to asking for bail.

Mr. Browbeeter closed his case accordingly, and the magistrate decided there was sufficient *prima facie* evidence to justify him in sending the matter to a jury, but eventually decided on accepting Wilfred's own recognizances to appear.

Catherine was overjoyed at the decision, and her unfortunate husband was about to step out of the dock, when he was stopped by the constable, and informed there was another charge against him, of assaulting the police.

This case having been heard, therefore, Mr. Easyman thought it was of sufficient magnitude to warrant him in sending the prisoner to jail for fourteen days, by which time he would have to take his trial on the other charge.

So, after all, poor Catherine went home sorrowing, and Wilfred was taken away in a two-horsed omnibus, or rather, in a living hearse, for each pas-

senger had a box to himself, and as if to make the simile more striking, there was the significant motto emblazoned outside, *Domine dirige nos*. What grim satirist first applied this device to such a purpose?

Only fancy, *Domine dirige nos*, with a policeman at the prow, and a warder at the helm. *Domine dirige nos*—to Newgate!

CHAPTER XI.

CONNUBIAL DEVOTION.

WHEN Messrs. Pekoe, Hyson, Nibbs, and Co., saw the name of their favourite traveller figuring in the police court news, they very properly sent a letter, discharging him without further notice.

They were also kind enough to signify that when he should come out of jail, they would be prepared to pay him any arrears of salary or commission, or, if he should desire it, they would pay the same to such wife or wives, as might seem to belong to him after the trial.

This considerate letter arrived the day after

Wilfred was committed, and was not at all calculated to improve the spirits of Catherine ; but her mind was so much engrossed with matters connected with the defence, that she paid very little attention to it.

As for Mrs. Gribble, she felt very much inclined to abandon what she was pleased to term "the whole bag of tricks," which comprehensive expression would, we apprehend, comprise everything, in any way connected with her son-in-law, save and except such property as he might, by a successful issue of the trial, establish in her daughter Catherine. She had arrived at those years of discretion, when people are apt to lay aside all sentiment in favour of more profitable considerations.

The daughter, however, although slightly depressed in her sober moments, at the thought of Wilfred being thrown out of employment, was in no way daunted.

And we think you will find that where a woman with a tendency to a peach-bloom complexion has once entered the holy bond of matrimony, she will go through fire and water, rather than be deprived of her husband, and return to the state from whence

he took her. It seems to change her whole nature, and what was erst a meek, yielding maiden, is now, if needs be, a lioness.

The principle may probably apply, in some measure, to the frail sisterhood in general, but it is, we fancy, more marked in a woman of superior development, as we know Catherine is.

Mrs. Gribble might, therefore, whimper as much as she pleased about the prospect of starvation, if Wilfred did get off; her daughter only replied that she meant to move Heaven and earth, but he should get off.

After hearing Leechcraft's masterly cross-examination, she was convinced of her husband's entire innocence, and what was more, she sincerely regarded him as a martyr, worthy of a wife's devotion.

Day by day, then, both she and the lawyer were engaged in raking up every vestige of evidence that might avail the unfortunate man. They had found out the owner of the ship that was lost, and ascertained that the first husband was not amongst their list of the passengers who had been drowned. Besides this, they had hunted up the attorneys who

had put in the execution, and discovered evidence to controvert the cruelty alleged by Mr. Browbeeter.

The governor of the jail, too, being a man with more kindness than cold discipline in his composition, had strained a point, to allow frequent communication with Wilfred, and you may easily imagine that if [the latter loved his Kitty in prosperity, he adored her now, in adversity. He was astonished at her fidelity, and it seemed to him nothing less than a miracle how she could call forth the means to supply the money-grubbing Leechcraft with the funds for such a defence.

It was Catherine's intention to have concealed the letter from Messrs. Pekoe, Hyson, Nibbs, and Co., until after the trial; but Wilfred was anxious that his employers should suspend their judgment before they suspended him, and he broached the subject first, and desired his wife and the attorney to call and explain matters. When he saw the letter, however, he became very wroth, and vowed vengeance on the firm should he be acquitted.

"You needn't be in the least worried about that," he said to Kitty. "I have stuck to them

through thick and thin, and have only to ask for another berth to get it. Messrs. Coffey and Cracker have hinted half a dozen times that if I liked to give them the benefit of my connection they would see me all right. I didn't do so because I'd been seven years with the other people, and I wasn't going to behave shabby as long as they treated me fairly; but wait till I get out of this cursed hole, and you'll see, my love, they'll wish they hadn't written that letter."

"If you can get another place, I shall only be too glad for you to leave," replied Catherine. "I have had a reason for wishing you to change ever since we were married," she continued, "but I didn't want to put it into your head until something else seemed to turn up."

"Why did you wish it, my love?" asked Wilfred, somewhat surprised.

"Ah! that's my business," she answered, with an air of great secrecy. "You prove you're innocent, and get out of this place, then I may p'raps tell you, but not until then."

"Very well, dear Kitty, I can wait. Thank goodness this first sentence will soon be over,

and I'm pretty confident of not being sent here again."

So Catherine went away much relieved, and even the uncompromising Mrs. Gribble was mollified the instant she heard that Wilfred had the prospect of another engagement at Messrs. Coffey and Cracker's.

"Yes," she said, after hearing the news, "it's a pity for the poor lad to be where he is. I allays thought as he was none so bad as he was said to be."

Indeed, altogether we are inclined to take a very hopeful view of things. There has been a storm to be sure, but there is nothing like it for clearing the air, and although the horizon is still overcast, we can see the great sun behind the clouds, waiting quietly until its time arrives to break through, or, in other words, until the exigencies of this novel shall render it necessary to come forth, and scatter happiness where there has been so much sorrow.

At least that is the view we have taken all along, for, in spite of the misfortunes which have crowded upon us with such bewildering rapi-

dity, we have never lost faith in our great principles.

It is true, there are some ugly obstacles still to be removed, clouds so dense that the sun may not be able to penetrate them, and we must abide our time before we can demonstrate to you the soundness of our faith.

If the presiding genius of fiction,—the universal solvent of all manner of contending improbabilities, does forsake us at last, the only way is to bear it as well as we can.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRIAL AND VERDICT.

NOTWITHSTANDING the undoubted rapacity of Mr. Leechcraft, he spared no pains in getting up his case, and, on the whole, it must be conceded that Catherine might have paid her fifty pounds to less purpose.

The superiority of his position over that of his opponent, Mr. Browbeeter, was immense. The

latter gentleman had, with the greatest difficulty, extorted some six or seven pounds from the first wife, with the promise of more when she received the balance which Mr. Paradise was to pay her. Thus you see he had no chance against a man who had seven or eight times that amount at his disposal. . And we are not sure whether the rivalry existing between these two advocates had not more to do with the attention bestowed by Leechcraft on his case, than any particular desire in his own mind to get Wilfred acquitted.

Any way the prisoner had the advantage of it, just as the public often gets a pull out of violent competition.

Browbeeter had trampled on Leechcraft long enough. He must be put down at any cost. If bringing the prisoner off with flying colours would tend to make the triumph more complete, the prisoner must be brought off with flying colours ; not for the prisoner's sake, but for the purpose of vanquishing Browbeeter.

It was an important red-letter day in the annals of Leechcraft's practice. He was never known to be so liberal to counsel, except on one

or two previous occasions, when he marked very large fees on some briefs, and never paid them. He could not repeat that trick, however. The counsel's clerks were a match for him ever afterwards. If they could not sue for their fees, they could at least give no trust, which alternative was found to be the most convenient after all. And if the world adopted the same course, how much need would there be for special pleaders? Some need, no doubt, but very little.

Leechcraft was determined, moreover, to have a big man, because he knew Browbeeter must of necessity have a small one (we, of course, refer to their relative positions at the bar, not their physical bulk), and hence we find him swaggering into court with the great Serjeant Braggart. He did not put down ten guineas and a conference fee without wincing; but Browbeeter must have the shine taken out of him for once, even at such a tremendous sacrifice.

So when the obscure Mr. Slenderfee rose to open the case, it was, perhaps, only a reasonable indulgence on the part of Mr. Leechcraft to cast a contemptuous glance towards his old enemy, and

remark to Catherine how thankful she ought to be for not having had the misfortune to go to Browbeeter before she came to him.

"Why, my dear lady," he continued, "I haven't the least bit of fear now. Slenderfee is a regular muff, but, then, what can you expect for a guinea? I've had to give the Serjeant twenty before he'd stir. I thought it was best to be on the safe side, and I knew you wouldn't mind going halves, if your husband gets off, would you?"

"No," said Catherine, cheerfully enough. "If he gets off, I will willingly pay half; but not without."

"Probably you may be inclined to condemn the attorney for saying he had paid twenty guineas when, in fact, he had only paid half. By all means do so; but we think you will find it difficult to discover a person so sinless in this respect that you can entrust him with the first stone."

Long before Slenderfee had finished the examination of his witnesses it became evident that the jury were favourable to the prisoner. The foreman asked some cogent questions, which revealed, to a great extent, their feelings on the matter.

Besides, Slenderfee's speech was very feeble, and the first wife completely bungled her evidence. When she saw proofs brought up, which she had thought were beyond possibility, she fairly broke down, and burst into tears.

"You may do with me as you please," she exclaimed, in desperation, "but whatever the verdict is, I shall claim that man as my husband."

Then came the Serjeant's turn to address the Court for the prisoner, and breathless attention ensued. He commenced with a powerful exordium, mainly devoted to a panegyric on the jurymen. He declared—"That he had never had the honour to address a more intelligent and far-seeing set of men. He need hardly say his client was proud to leave his destiny in their keeping, knowing full well that they would not be led away by the eloquence of his friend Slenderfee, but would look sternly at the facts, and send him away free from that court without a blemish upon his character. A jury was the grand palladium of English liberty—the safeguard against oppression—and it was the especial privilege of an Englishman to be able to demand to be tried by his fellow countrymen,

which privilege had never borne better fruit than when on the present occasion it brought him face to face with twelve men, good and true, and before whom he would now endeavour to lay the facts as they were"—and so on.

And we think while he was on this question he might have added that it is also the especial privilege of an Englishman to be dragged from his business, for weeks at a time, maybe, to try a case of childish bickering amongst postulants in a convent kitchen, to hear how this one filched jam in the pantry, and how that other one wore her boots round her neck, as a penance to chasten her unruly spirit—or, perchance, still worse, to investigate some loathsome charge which ought never to have seen healthy daylight. By this especial privilege, the law-abiding and tax-paying citizen becomes the victim of the law-breaker. Nay, the privilege is two-fold. He has first to work himself into the last stage of nervous debility to pay his taxes and provide expensive machinery for litigious and law-breaking men, and as if that were not sufficient he must next sacrifice his time, which to him is money. It is simply monstrous that anybody who

is not adequately paid, and who does not go of his own free will, should be forcibly taken from matters of life and death importance to himself and family, and shut up in a close court for weeks to listen to the veriest rubbish that ever occupied the attention of bread-winning men. If you will cling to juries (and we have no wish to abolish them), there are thousands of competent people of means would enrol themselves for idle curiosity sake, and still more, provided there was something like adequate remuneration attached to the service. Then, those who now feel the serious hardship of being suddenly summoned from their occupations, might hold back in favour of those who have nothing to do.

Under present circumstances, we can well understand the inconvenience that may arise from being unable to get a jury together; but, even so, we should like to ask those judges who seem to think men are mere shuttle-cocks for their battledores to play with, whether it ever occurred to them, when they talked largely about fining this one £50 to-day, and that one £100 to-morrow, to think for a moment on the relative positions of themselves and the parties they are dealing out such liberal

penalties to. We do so, not because it is any argument in favour of jurymen disregarding their summonses, while the law stands as it is, but because we conceive a judge should be very sparing, both with his remarks and his penalties, when he is administering a law, which, at the best of times, must operate cruelly towards hard-working men.

Perhaps, therefore, while Serjeant Braggart is exhausting his eloquence in defence of Wilfred's cardinal virtues, and in depreciation of the prosecutor's base motives, there would be no great harm done if we were to listen to a jurymen for a moment, that we may just get a glimpse of his view of the question of juries, and what he thinks of the relative advantages of those who are paid to try causes, and those who are not.

Doubtless the Serjeant's great speech would be more in place, but as we have had the pith of it in Mr. Leechcraft's cross-examination before the magistrate, we can easily drop in when the judge sums up, and the verdict is given.

We will assume, then, for the nonce, that a jurymen is allowed to address the court in mitigation

of his fine, and (what we fear is somewhat utopian) he is also allowed to express his honest convictions.

We can imagine that such a speech might assume the following shape:—

“My Lord—

“As your lordship has done me the favour of passing some very severe strictures upon my conduct in absenting myself on the occasion of being summoned to attend this honourable court, and as your lordship has likewise further signified your displeasure by inflicting upon me a fine which I cannot afford to pay, I should like to say a few words, with a view of showing your lordship the feelings with which men, who abstain from law-breaking themselves, and gain no advantage by other people’s litigation, regard the hardship thus imposed upon me. My object will not be to impugn your lordship’s right to administer an unjust law, but rather, by comparison and otherwise, to show that my complaint is not without foundation. And in doing this I will venture to adopt a very familiar illustration. Your lordship will probably be constrained to admit that while, for example, we liberally remunerate the leader or

organist, we should not expect the man who blows the bellows, not only to support himself and give his time, but to contribute a quota to the organist's stipend also.

"Now, as your lordship is aware, I have the especial privilege of being that humble blower, who raises the wind for these elaborate performances—or, in other words, I am a tax-payer. To your lordship, who has just spoken so contemptuously of me, is given the honour of being a large tax-consumer—albeit not larger than your lordship's well known ability and legal acumen entitle you to be. I say this not out of any petty envy, but merely to remind your lordship that, being placed beyond all anxiety with an unfailing supply at your command, which is not affected by vacations or illness, you can well afford to address me in terms which I should hesitate to apply to my meanest employé. So much, then, for your lordship.

"I will now say a word in reference to these gentlemen of the wig and gown fraternity. I observed they indulged in some show of merriment during the delivery of your lordship's animadversions on myself, and I will not venture to

assail such an august body by remarking upon the good or bad taste of such a display. I can quite understand there may be an implied etiquette amongst members of the bar to smile at anything your lordship may be pleased to observe, and that such smiles may be very ingeniously proportioned to the several expectations of the smilers. I shall, therefore, pass by these manifestations with this one remark. These gentlemen, unlike myself, are not only exempt from service on juries, but they are handsomely paid for their attendance here—a circumstance which can scarcely be said to be at variance with the cheerfulness with which they have regarded my misfortune. Altogether, then, I think they also can well afford to chuckle at my expense.

“Now, if your lordship pleases, I will direct your attention, for a little space, to the prisoner at the bar. As far as I know to the contrary, he may be a worthless scamp, who neither toils nor spins, except under compulsion. He has never contributed aught to the fiscal burden of his country, and his very sloth has gained for him an exemption from serving on juries also. Yet even he is treated

with more consideration than your lordship's humble servant. Being an idle vagabond, society has invested him with a right to drag hard-working citizens from their honest labour, and demand what it facetiously terms the grand palladium of English liberty. Thus, I can well understand, that even he may laugh in his sleeve when your lordship was pleased to mulct me in the penalty to which I have referred.

“ Having then glanced at the principal characters interested in these proceedings, I will make bold to ask your lordship why I, amongst all this crowd, should be the one unhappy beast of burden required to bear the whole brunt of other men's folly ?

“ If your lordship should argue that all unfortunate tax-payers are equally liable to serve their country at the cost of great individual sacrifice, then I will only answer that a law compelling everybody to serve in the militia might be justified on the same grounds. I cannot see that the operation of a civil press-gang is one iota less oppressive than a military one.

“ At all events, I presume, your lordship will

concede me this much—that any law is unjust which smites its victims with a two-edged sword. If it assumes the right to stop my mill, and leave my servants idling at my expense, it might at least refrain from levying on my machinery for taxes when I am unable to pay them. I am, of course, open to conviction, and at all times desirous of according to your lordship such respect as may be necessary for the becoming dignity of a court of law; but, in conclusion, I may be allowed to suggest that I am entitled to some consideration in return. Although I am but a humble citizen, I think I may be put to more graceful use than being made a butt of legal contumely. The idea may not be a new one, but it has often struck me, nevertheless, that the tax-payer gets much less respect from the tax-consumer than he is fairly entitled to. Besides, there is a worn-out axiom of political economy, which, I think, may be worth consideration, if it has any worth at all. A country owes its prosperity to its producers, however insignificant and lowly they may be. Whether your lordship considers that lawyers may be included in that category or not, is a question I will not

attempt to answer ; but I may well ask my fellow-producers how long they will submit to a law which, while it may deprive them of a month's liberty at a time, expects them to contribute some millions every year to provide machinery, which ought to be equal to the simple task of trying malefactors, and setting litigious and quarrelsome people right. And now, may it please your lordship, that is my case."

And we can well imagine the sigh of relief with which a lady reader, tired of digressions, peruses the last sentence.

But you must remember that we have more than once endeavoured to impress upon you that this is a novel of purpose. We are not quite able to explain what the term means ; but if you can imagine a Blue Book turned into a romance, it might assist you in getting at a faint idea of the definition. In the present case, it is no doubt a trap to inveigle unwary readers, to the end that they may be bored to death with such fanciful vagaries as may cross the writer's mind—which vagaries they would never think of reading, if they were set out and ticketed in the essay form.

Well, if it is any comfort to you, we will faithfully promise to bring the story to a speedy conclusion, on its merits ; so let us return to the court, and take notes of the judge's summing up.

When Serjeant Braggart sat down, amidst half-suppressed applause, there was not required much knowledge of physiognomy to discern the effect which his telling peroration had made upon the jury.

The sober-sided judge perceived this, and after declaring, in common with every other judge who ever presided over an interesting enquiry, that if there was any more unseemly exhibition of feeling he would have the court cleared—he did not have the court cleared, but went on with his summing up as a sensible judge should do.

He said—"Gentlemen of the jury. Having heard the evidence on both sides, it is now my duty to ask you to give your calm and dispassionate consideration to the facts elicited in this extraordinary enquiry ; and with such assistance, as I may be able to impart, you will have to determine whether the prisoner at the bar is guilty or not guilty.

"If, after duly weighing all the evidence, you should find the prisoner has committed bigamy, you will, of course, find him guilty of the charge for which he now stands indicted. If, on the contrary, you find the prisoner has not committed bigamy, it will then be your duty to bring in your verdict of acquittal.

"It is clearly laid down in the law of this country, that any man having a wife alive and not divorced from him, is, to all intents and purposes, a married man. Now I need scarcely inform you, that, assuming this to be the case, if he marries again, it would be your business to find he had two wives ; and whatever pity you may feel inclined to extend to a man under such trying circumstances you must dispossess your minds of all such bias, and inevitably come to the conclusion that he has committed bigamy. You will have gathered from the evidence, that the actual marriages are not traversed by the defence ; so that a *prima facie* case of bigamy is clearly set up. But it will be for you to consider whether the prosecutor, at the time of the first marriage, was in a position to enter into the contract with the prisoner. If her first husband

was dead, you will, of course, find that she was a widow, and therefore free. If her first husband was alive, you will find that he wasn't dead, and therefore your verdict will be that the contract was *nudum pactum*, and the prisoner would be at liberty to marry again, should he be so disposed. If there be any doubt in your minds about these facts, then you must give the benefit of it to the accused. Still, on the other hand, if you consider the case has been fully made out, you must not flinch from saying so. Nothing would more effectually prejudice public morals, than by allowing detected crime to go unpunished. No doubt it will be a great hardship on the second wife if, by your verdict, she loses all claim to that title ; but you must not forget that the prosecutor, assuming she has satisfied you that she is the legal wife, is entitled to the first consideration.

"It remains then, gentlemen, for you to discharge from your minds all prejudice, and feeling of any sort, and to calmly examine the facts, taking care that if they prove the prisoner to be guilty, you find a verdict accordingly, without allowing any maudlin pity for him, or the second

wife, to interfere with your duty. At the same time, you must not lose sight of the plea set up by the defence, which, if established, would undoubtedly entitle the prisoner to an acquittal on all the counts. And with these observations, I will now leave you to deal with the case as you may consider most in accordance with your consciences, bearing in mind the solemn oaths under which you are bound to render strict justice to the parties now seeking it at your hands."

It would be very difficult to say whether Catherine or Wilfred looked the more anxiously at the jury. The first wife seemed to be so petrified with misery, as to be perfectly unconscious of anything.

The moment the jurymen put their heads together, it seemed to have the effect of putting them all at loggerheads. While they were mere listeners they displayed striking symptoms of unanimity, but we suppose that is often the case until you set men a-talking.

Eventually, however, the foreman stepped forward, and, then, if you like, there was some real intensity of feeling depicted on the faces of Cathe-

rine and Wilfred. We question very much whether there is any suspense in life so acute as this waiting for the verdict, particularly where there is latitude sufficient for its being guilty or not guilty.

Catherine was not given to fainting before the tragical part of this history commenced, but on this occasion she was very close to it, and, when the clerk of the court prepared to ask the all-important question, she trembled from head to foot.

"Gentlemen, are you all agreed? Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

The foreman stammered out that they couldn't agree, and wanted to know if the verdict of eleven would be taken, adding that these eleven were married men, and thought the prisoner must have been punished enough by having two wives. The twelfth was going to be married in a month, and wanted time to consider his verdict. If he couldn't have it, he would find the prisoner guilty, but strongly recommend him to mercy.

Of course, the judge told them they must retire, which, in plain language, signified that they were to be locked up without fire, candle, and the rest of it, until that twelfth man could be induced to

forego his conviction, violate his oath, and return a verdict which he conscientiously believed to be wrong. Fortunately for the people most interested, it only took half an hour to accomplish all this; and the foreman again came forward.

Then the clerk, amid breathless silence, repeated the question, and Catherine and Wilfred glanced imploringly at the man who held their destinies in his hand.

"We are agreed, and find the prisoner not guilty on all the counts."

Catherine was so overpowered with joy that she went into screaming hysterics, and was led from the court by her mother.

Wilfred was moved to tears, for, what with hearing himself characterised as a villain by one man, and extolled as a paragon of virtue by another, he had really got a very confused notion into his head as to how much of both he was entitled to.

No wonder, then, when the jury sent him free from that court without a stain upon his character, he should have shed tears of gratitude, if only to find there was a shred of righteousness left in him.

We will not attempt to describe the first moments of the subsequent interview between him and Catherine. It would baffle our humble pen to do so, if we had two ordinary people to deal with, but, in the present case, it is simply impossible to do justice to it.

But this much we may say, that the sensation seemed the exact converse of the anxiety which preceded the verdict. And, after all, how delightful these moments must be. Indeed, we are not quite sure whether it is not worth a man's while to be locked up on a false charge, for sake of the pleasure of getting off, and the great flood of affection and welcome which he plunges into when he comes out. It is possible to get too sluggish, even unto the limits of boredom, and what people call *ennui* is but another name for worthless idleness. Such people want an occasional spurt, and we believe there is nothing so effectual as being suddenly locked up. It would do them more good than a whole quarter's salary.

As the triumphant trio passed out of the court, they saw poor Nelly looking dreadfully dejected, and by her side was Browbeeter, declar-

ing very forcibly that he must have some more money.

Wilfred was so happy at the thought of having got the great weight off his mind, that all malice seemed to vanish the instant the verdict was given. So when he saw Nelly, and thought of her poverty, it touched a sympathetic chord in his heart. He knew perfectly well that, whatever her faults had been, she had loved him once, and watched with unremitting attention at his bedside on the occasion of a severe illness.

To the great consternation of Mrs. Gribble, therefore, he beckoned to her, but for some time the poor woman thought he meant to deride her, and held back. At length she approached slowly, with Browbeeter at her heels.

"Look here," said Wilfred, bluntly. "I want mother and Catherine to hear all I say. You've now tried to ruin me, and had your revenge, and I'm not bound to take the slightest notice of you any more. You're very miserable, however, and I am very happy, and I don't want to be spiteful. While I have a crust I don't want you to starve, so if you like to come to the shop of Mr. Paradise, I

will ask him to pay you, for me, what allowance I can afford."

"You're very kind," said the woman, bitterly, and with a tincture of irony in her tone. "If I dare commit suicide, I would not trouble you, but I shall see;" and she glided away from him.

When Wilfred reached the fresh air a free man again, his first impulse was to light a pipe, and he obeyed it.

Then they speeded on to Peckham as swiftly as the blood-horse of a four-wheeler could take them.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN IMPORTANT SECRET DISCLOSED.

VERILY, we believe that that genius to which we have referred is behaving very handsomely to us.

But a fortnight ago, and the prospect was as dismal as it well could be. Grim spectres were lurking about everywhere. Despondency and doubt, unspeakable misery and catastrophe, were

all combining to thwart our efforts to make Catherine and Wilfred permanently happy.

And now you may behold them installed again within the precincts of Spoonystone Villa, and with every sign of returning bliss.

The friends who fled erewhile in dismay, are now flocking back to welcome the lost sheep. Even the uncompromising Mr. Paradise is proud to shake hands once more with the man who has passed through the searching flames of scandal, and come out therefrom unscathed and triumphant.

Scarce a week has elapsed since the trial, when Catherine insists upon having another small gathering or evening party; and so we find the very proper Miss Crotchet again in her place before that familiar pianette. She, who fled supperless and horrified on that eventful night, is now quietly playing her "Chime again, chime again, beautiful bells," while, to all outward appearance, the host and hostess were never so happy in their lives before.

It was a proud moment for Wilfred. No longer he looked about him with anxiety and suspicion. Besides he came home this same night with a light

heart, for he had made a most advantageous bargain with Messrs. Coffey and Cracker, and could, and did snap his fingers at Messrs. Pekoe, Hyson, Nibbs, and Co.

"Yes, my dear," said he to the charming Catherine, "I shall have fifty pounds a year more in salary, and make at least another fifty in extra commission."

Small wonder then, that the discerning Mrs. Gribble, after hearing this, again declared that she had always said the lad was none so bad as he'd been painted.

There's nothing like success, we can assure you, for gaining rapidly the affection of a mother-in-law.

But oh, how very much dearer was he to Catherine. Not because it had cost her a sixty pounds of that mysterious money in the background to drag him through his troubles, but because he had proved himself as we always thought he would, to be one of the most exemplary young men in Peckham. In short, it was becoming plainer every day, that however disagreeable the ordeal which Wilfred had just passed through, might have been, it had really been of immense service to him.

If he had dreaded the impending thunderstorm, the air was now deliciously cool and clear, and he could join in the merry-making with some reasonable hope of ultimately passing the night in his own bed.

On this occasion as before, a sumptuous supper was provided, and you can easily imagine that as the guests were partaking of it, their thoughts more than once reverted to that unexpected guest, who played such havoc with their previous enjoyment.

And when Mr. Paradise had satisfied his temporal wants, he became very chatty, and evinced the unmixed pleasure which it afforded him to be able to say that ever since he had been officially connected with his little tabernacle, there had never been an instance of one of the flock going astray for very long at a time. If anything of the kind had ever happened, it always turned out that the sheep was not at fault. Some mischievous dog might have dragged it through the mire, but it invariably came back to the fold again, and was received with re-doubled affection.

Of course, Catherine was very grateful for this courteous allusion to her husband's forced absence

from his usual place of worship, and she mentally resolved to bestow, if possible, more love on Wilfred, whom she regarded as the innocent sheep, and more malice on Nelly, who was undoubtedly the mischievous dog.

It was nearly midnight before the jovial party broke up, and then Wilfred with his well-known gallantry, would insist upon seeing all the young ladies home. And even this trifling pleasure derived an additional zest from the recollection that time was when he had been rudely deprived of the privilege.

Although it was late when he returned, and the old woman had betaken herself to bed, he stirred up the fire, and sat down before it, to have a little chat with Kitty.

And we presume there is no harm in saying that when he had lighted his pipe, she sat upon his knee, and encircled his neck with her right arm.

They talked pleasantly about the happy turn which events had taken, and upon the bright prospect which seemed to be looming in the distance.

As the time stole on, Catherine hinted that they would have to be up early in the morning, but

Wilfred was so happy, that he must re-load his pipe, and begin again.

"Look here," he said, as he took hold of his wife's hand, "I think you know pretty well all my secrets by this time. Now I want to know some of yours."

"You must wait till I'm had up for bigamy," she replied, with a wicked smile. "You didn't tell me yours until you were."

"All right, my darling, I can bear a bit of chaffing now, but you might as well tell me where the dickens you managed to find all that money."

"I am not sure that you deserve to be told," she said in a tantalising tone. "Who knows what may turn up yet? You seem such a dangerous character."

"At any rate, my love, you may rest assured there isn't another wife in the background, and what's more, I mean to tell you everything for the future."

"Well, I don't mind believing your promise for this once. Perhaps, then, you recollect the night when you were just taking leave of me, after our walk on the Canal bank."

"I should think I do, rather," said Wilfred.

"And perhaps, you remember at the same time how surprised my mother and sister were when you mentioned the name of Nibbs."

"Yes, by Jove, and how cunning my little pet was, when she tried to deceive me on that occasion."

"Very well, I suppose I needn't tell you any more, as you say I deceived you."

"Do go on, you little wretch, I only thought it seemed rather queer."

"Well, it was queer enough, no doubt, as you will probably say, when you hear the rest."

"But you don't mean to say you were married to Nibbs, and got a divorce?"

"No, I wasn't quite so foolish as somebody I know, but, I dare say, you may have heard that Mr. Nibbs used to travel down our way."

"Of course he did, when he couldn't manage to shove the journey on to one of us."

"Well, he used to come to mother for orders, and he seemed to take a liking to me."

"The devil he did!"

"Yes, and wrote to me several times, and wanted me to come up to London, where he said he would

have me polished, and then he would marry me."

"Well, that is a romance, and no mistake.— And, pray, what did you do?"

"Oh, mother wouldn't hear of such a thing, unless he married me first, and then he seemed to regret what he'd done, and the letters were soon stopped, and we heard a few months afterwards that he'd married a lady with money."

"By Jove, that is funny. Why, I know he lives in great style, somewhere at Clapham."

"When mother heard of it, she was very angry, and went to the lawyer, down at Cochinchina, about it. She showed him the letters, and he said he would bring an action for breach of promise."

"And here I was travelling for the firm all the time. Why bless my soul, it beats my case into fits."

"Well, he did so, and claimed a thousand pounds, for what he said were damages, but I didn't understand a bit about that."

"And I never heard a word of it?"

"No, you wouldn't. He was afraid of it coming out, and so he settled by paying me seven hundred pounds, and the attorney all his costs."

"And you, sly puss, have kept all this from me?"

"Of course I have, and a good job too. Mother was so pleased, that she gave the lawyer fifty pounds extra, and the rest was invested for me. Then I came to London, to learn the drapery business, which I meant to go into, if I hadn't met you, and that's how it happened I came to be in Mr. Poplin's shop, and was going down to visit mother, when you first saw me. Well, what with your misconduct, and the lawyers, a good deal of the money has gone, but I have still nearly five hundred left, which is yours, if you only know how to behave yourself better in future."

"Upon my life, I always thought you were a treasure," said the delighted Wilfred, clasping her round the waist, and flinging down his pipe, "but I never expected such luck as this. Can it be possible!—five hundred pounds, and me kept in ignorance of it all this time?"

"Well, at all events, I think the secret was worth more than the one you kept from me," said Catherine, with an air of triumph.

"I should think it was, my own beloved Kitty. I shan't sleep to-night. Five hundred pounds, did

you say? Why, good gracious me, I can't believe it. Are you sure you said Five hundred? Oh lord, wonders never will cease. Do for pity's sake mix me a glass of brandy-and-water. I never dreamt when I took Nibbs' ground, that it would be paved with all this gold. If I am ever false to you, Kitty, after this, may I never live to have another glass of brandy-and-water. I must have one more pipe on the strength of it."

CHAPTER XIV.

TWELVE MONTHS AFTERWARDS.

HAVING now disclosed the two secrets, which seemed to form the ground-work of this story, the pivot, in fact, around which the stirring incidents revolved, we were pluming ourselves greatly on the prospect of immediate exemption from that terrible affliction which has been described as the "lust of finishing."

How is it possible, thought we, to do more justice to our hero and heroine than has already been done?

All their troubles have vanished, every little difficulty has been handsomely squared, and they have both been made prodigiously happy after their kind.

But while these reflections were passing through our mind, it occurred to us that there was still something wanting, before we could make a graceful bow to the reader, with the full consciousness that we had fulfilled our task.

True, it may be, we soliloquised, that we have done all and even more than could be expected for the special felicity of Catherine and Wilfred, but how about the unhappy woman, Nelly?

Do we mean to scandalise the weaker vessel by leaving on record the grim portrait of a woman who wilfully committed bigamy, and then prosecuted the unfortunate second husband! Or, if that be our intention, is it not desirable that we should show how she was punished for her sins, and at least bring the villainess of the piece to a direful end.

Besides, who knows but she may have carried out her threat of suicide, and cleansed her wickedness in the Regent's Canal! If such be the case,

moreover, see what a grand opportunity there will be opened up for sensational moralising. The most veritable journeyman would scarcely be excused, for letting such a chance escape his attention, and so for the credit of our craft, it appeared necessary to prolong this narrative to that extent, if no further. To do this, however, without materially increasing its bulk, was a matter of some difficulty, and hence we have thought it best to allow twelve months to elapse before paying a farewell visit to Peckham, and then by way of a retrospective post-script, inform the reader of the result of our enquiries.

It was then, in the cheerful blaze of the following Christmastide, that we again found ourselves in that usually quiet suburban retreat. The weather was intensely severe, and there was one of those clear keen frosts abroad, which are such mortal enemies to vegetarianism. Nothing makes the carnivorous tooth so lickerish, and nothing makes such sad havoc with the prize beef. The cold suggests animal carbon, and you know Englishmen go largely to the Bovine Kingdom for fuel, and as a rule, they have mighty furnaces of their own.

And, still, it was a pleasant sight to see the great

array of comestibles, as you wended your way through the main streets. Pleasanter, possibly, than to see the consumers the day after Christmas. It seems, perhaps, a little odd to commemorate the birth of a spiritual Saviour by dyspeptic gormandising, but then it's English to the letter, and must therefore be right. The butchers and grocers would, doubtless, urge it was good for trade, and it would be fatal to propagate anything in England that was not. You may think the parsons ought to be more busy than the doctors at such a time, but the mischief of it is, that the parsons themselves too often want the doctors also. The great unclean spirit of indigestion must be cast out by somebody, so very likely it works all right in the end. And yet we fancy when Satan sends forth that great unclean spirit at Christmastide, he shows what a mighty cunning devil he is!

But we promised not to digress any more, so let us get out of the flare of the main streets, and turn down Gingerbread Grove, and make for Spoony-stone Villa.

There appeared something about the aspect of the place that indicated a change since our last visit.

And when, in response to a knock, a tidy little maid informed us that Mr. Wildblood did not live there, we could well comprehend it.

"And pray, child, who does reside here?" we enquired, in great astonishment that she did not even appear to know that such a person had lived there.

"Mr. Wilkinson is master's name," she said mildly.

"Mr. who?" we exclaimed, in still greater astonishment. "Are we dreaming? This is Spoonystone Villa, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And do you know where Mr. Wildblood's gone?"

"He's close to here, sir; but I didn't know as he'd lived at this house. I havn't been here only a month. Master and Misses is in now, and if you'll come inside I'll call 'em."

"Certainly. The name rather puzzles us."

And presently a dark bushy-whiskered man came out. He had thick shaggy eyebrows, and somewhat hard features, but when he spoke, his gentleness seemed to contradict his whole outward demeanour.

"You will excuse the interruption," we said,

half bashfully, "but, from what your servant says, you can direct us to the abode of the previous tenant."

"She shall go round and show you," he replied, with the utmost civility; and before we had time to express our thanks he had called out, "Nelly, dear, I want Mary to go to Mr. Wildblood's with this gentleman. Make haste."

On hearing this, we became so bewildered that we were at a loss what to say to the strange man who stood before us.

Fortunately, at this juncture, the wife appeared on the scene, and then you can well picture to yourself the consternation that ensued.

There she was in life, as far from committing suicide as was any other married woman in the three kingdoms.

"Good heavens," we ejaculated, when we had recovered in some measure from our surprise, "are you the——?" and here prudential considerations checked us.

"You can speak out," she replied, with a smile. "My husband knows all about it. This is the gentleman," she continued, "who lodged in my house soon after you left, and from whom I have

more than once received kindly assistance in my subsequent trouble."

"And I'm jolly proud to make your acquaintance," said the husband, proffering his hand in such a manner as to remove all doubt of his sincerity. "You see," he said, "I'm a plain sort of customer, as every fellow must be who's been knocking about in bush life for ever so many years, but my wife's often told me how kind you was when I unfortunately left her."

"Well, this is certainly a pleasant surprise," was our reply. "How, in the name of all that's probable, came these wonderful things to pass?"

"It's just this, sir. I've heard about the marriage with Wildblood, and the trial, and all the rest of it, and there's nobody to blame but me. It ain't pleasant to know as my wife married another man, and it ain't pleasant to know as he left her, and she suffered so much; but, strange as it may seem, I'll say it nevertheless, as the best friend I have now is Nelly here, and the next best friend is Wildblood, who you want to see. The fact is, neither on em's to blame in the least. I'm answerable for the whole concern, and it's best after all as it's turned out as it has."

"We must say it appears rather paradoxical," we said, with a smile, "but you're certainly about as candid a fellow as we have met for some time."

"Aye, sir, and although I'm answerable for the lot, I don't think as I was much to blame, either because everything went wrong, and I did what I did more out of kindness than anything else."

"You'll undoubtedly get us into a maze very soon," said we, with all the good humour we could summon, for there was a blunt kind of sincerity about the man, that was to say the least, very fascinating.

"But before I tell you how it happened, you must have something to drink, an' if you smoke I've got as fine a cake of Cavendish as ever you smelt the flavour on. I'm a plain sort of man, as I told you, but if you don't mind a few cakes they're at your service. Now, Nelly, bring in the spirits and pipes, and then I can talk."

It was a genuine treat to see the slim form of Nelly flitting about as cheerfully as if she had never gone through any misery at all. And then to see how thoroughly neat she was, and how well her attire became her. There was no attempt at

extravagance of any sort. Her troubles had evidently toned down all vanity, and she was simply dressed in plain black silk, with such additions of white cuffs and collars as one would expect to see in a woman getting on for forty. What a contrast from the unhappy figure she had cut but a year ago in that very same room !

“Well, sir,” said the husband, after helping us both to some refreshment, and lighting a pipe for himself, “it’s no use me telling you as I went to Australia, because you know it already. You know, likewise, as the vessel was wrecked, and it was thought as I was drowned with the rest on ’em. But of course I wasn’t, or I shouldn’t be here to tell you so. Now, when we landed off another ship at Melbourne, I hadn’t a blessed farthing left, and only the clothes I had on me, and a fellow as I had made a sort of mate on, and who was in the same plight as myself, agreed with me as we should take a berth some hundreds of miles inland on a sheep run. Well, for days I thought about what I should do as to poor Nelly. I didn’t know how many years I should be away, and it galled me to think as she would be in dreadful want. At last,

in a fit of desperation, I got my mate to write, informing her as I was drowned, and to say as when the ship struck we had agreed, between ourselves, that whichever escaped should write to the wife or friends of him as didn't. In doing this, my notion was that she would, p'raps, be able to get married again, with a clear conscience, and save herself from poverty, and I made up my mind that come what would I should stop in the colony, or if I was tempted back again I'd make enquiries for her, and if I found she was married, I'd cut off and not reveal myself. I may have been very wrong in such conduct, but there wasn't a bit of selfishness about it, for I never meant to marry again as long as I lived; and a fellow don't think much about his catechism at a time like that."

"Then we suppose that's the letter you said you'd lost when the trial was taking place?" we inquired of Nelly, who was now seated under the shadow of her husband.

"Yes, sir, it is," replied the wife. "You know, sir," she added, "I went through some fearful trouble, and for a long time I kept the letter in my pocket, but when it came to parting with my

clothes, I think it must have gone with them. I never had a chance of redeeming them, and when that wretched trial came on, it was too late by many years to do so, even if I had had the means."

"Well, your lives are unquestionably a romance in themselves," we said. "What a blessing it seems for you both that after all these vicissitudes you should have been destined to meet again."

"It is a blessing," replied the husband, and if you are not in a hurry I'll tell you exactly how it all came about."

"We shall be most pleased to listen to the end," we replied, and the remark was, in every respect, a true one.

"You must know, sir, that me and my mate carried out our intentions, and went inland hundreds of miles from any town, and were put on one of the sheep runs. We didn't get much wages, but we were not short of substantial rations. The place we lived in was only a rude cabin, knocked up out of green timber, and I must say we wasn't much better than savages. As far as society went, we might as well have been put on a light ship in

the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. When a few stray travellers did cross our run, we'd have fain gone on half rations for a year to keep 'em with us, but they seldom stayed more than a day or two together. They may talk about angels' visits and such like, but I can tell you that when a man's been confined in a wilderness for a twelvemonth he wouldn't inquire whether his visitors came from above or below, and if they brought an English newspaper with them, why you'd let them have the best your cabin could supply.

"Well, as luck would have it, about eight months after we'd been in this place, two curious looking fellows came up to our cabin at dusk, one evening, and they brought a batch of papers, one of which contained the particulars of the wreck of the vessel we'd come out in. How I did devour that paper you may easily guess, but nothing would tempt the fellows to leave it behind them, and they journeyed on the next morning by day-break. For weeks after I couldn't get anything in my thoughts but poor Nelly here, still I knew my doom was fixed by that letter, and I used to cry like a simple child. As to how the time passed, we

never seemed to know exactly, though we had some sort of way of calculating when the rations was due again, and, of course, watched the change in the seasons. Every day me and my mate used to back a horse, and ride forty or fifty miles before sunset, until I knew my way about the country better than I do in London. We used to follow the streams and gullies, and nick trees, and do all kinds of things to mark out the different rides we took."

"And how long were you in that grim solitude?" we inquired, as he was re-loading his pipe, and preparing for a further instalment.

"Well, sir, I was going to tell you. I should think we was nearly three years there, and all that time we didn't, as a matter of course, spend any of our wages except for a few flannel shirts, and such like. Now it happened in the fall of the year, as a party of settlers was passing our way, that we heard there was a good opening for a store at a small place about three days' journey from Melbourne, and me and my mate talked over the matter, and agreed to give up our dismal employment, and see if we could better ourselves by doing a little trade

of that sort. You know, it was understood from the first between us, that nothing but death itself should separate us, and as we went 'fair do's' in every mortal thing, there wasn't much fear of our splitting. Well, sir, that was the best piece of business I ever did in my life, and when we got to our new settlement we bought a few acres of land, and built up a hut in no time. It wasn't near so lonely, and while one attended to the business, the other used to go to Melbourne to market, and to invest such spare money as we had, for we did a famous trade after a while. But even for all our good fortune, I wasn't happy. Every night I thought of poor Nelly, and began to wish from the bottom of my heart that letter had never been written. I'd now the chance of sending money home, but dare not for the life of me write lest she might have married 'again, and I should get her into trouble. You can't tell, sir, the misery I went through on that account. I'd have given worlds to be where I am now, and my advice is, to take the old woman with you wherever you go, or you'll never have any peace till you see her again."

"And very good advice, too," we said, by way

"No doubt, sir, you will say," he continued, after a pause, "that I had better reason to be thankful, when I found he had left me every penny he had in the world ; but whatever people may think, I didn't care a fraction about it ; and since I have come back, I've put at least a dozen advertisements in the papers for his relations, but nobody's turned up as yet. I'd a good deal more money of my own than I shall ever use ; and if I can find anybody belonging to him, they shall not be left wanting."

"And we can tell you, good man, it's a right down pleasure to meet such an honest fellow," we said, grasping his hand with enthusiasm. "If the world was full of such hearts as yours, we might soon throw law to the dogs, although we love our faithful friends too much to wish them such a withering misfortune."

"Well, sir, the moment I set foot on English soil, I made at once for the house we used to live in ; but I could get no information there. Then I went to some very old friends, and found, to my great joy, that Nelly had been there, and told them all about the trial. She told them, also, that Mr.

Paradise was to pay her a small allowance, and I posted off there at once. He informed me that she was employed, through his influence, to do needlework for a hosier, who was a friend of his, and he gave me the address. I was afraid the shock would be too much for her, if I went and called ; so I told Mr. Paradise the tale I have been relating to you, and got him to go and prepare her, by saying that somebody from Australia had been enquiring about her. The two days that passed before we actually met, I was like a foolish mad-man. It's no use trying to describe the feeling. I watched the shop, and saw and recognized her ; but I dare not go up and speak. She looked the image of sorrow, but still was the picture of neatness. Well, Mr. Paradise did as I wished him, and gradually broke the matter to her. Then he ventured to say it would be strange if I should turn out to be her long-lost husband, after all her troubles. It's plain he didn't act the part very well, for she saw through it at once, and swooned away in a minute, and when she recovered again, declared she had dreamt she saw me. When I heard that, I thought, perhaps, she might have

caught a sight of me at the time I was watching, and it had preyed on her mind. But to make a long story short, it was arranged, at last, we should meet in the room over Mr. Paradise's shop, and then you can just imagine there was a scene. Although she knew that I had been told everything, she would insist on repeating all that had occurred since I left ; and said she did so, because she didn't wish to force me to live with her, if I thought she was to blame. Of course, I only clasped her to my heart, and gave her such a hug as settled all that in no time."

"We have certainly heard many curious stories," we said, "but we never thought we should be face to face with the actors in one like this. Besides, how came you to take Spoonystone Villa above all other places?"

"Well, when Nelly saw I was alive, and safe and sound, she was in desperate trouble about having prosecuted Wilfred Wildblood ; and hearing I could well afford it, she begged me to repay him all she'd received at his hands. You may be sure I wasn't long in agreeing to do that, for how could I blame either him or her in the matter. So then

we started off at once, in a cab, and Mr. Paradise along with us. When we got here, of course, there was another scene, and Wildblood was indignant when I offered him the money. After a while, however, he consented to take a couple of hundreds, and appeared very thankful ; after which, we got talking about one thing and another, and left the women to make things right between themselves. I don't think it took ten minutes to make *us* friends ; and I liked Wilfred so much, that before leaving, I says, ' I'm a stranger in these parts, but, maybe, you could tell me where I could let upon a little house, something like this ; I'm not very particular.' ' Oh,' says Wildblood, ' my term's not out here ; but I must leave in a week or fortnight at most ; so what do you say to this place ? You'd have the benefit of all improvements and fittings, and I want to make some little return for your generosity.' ' You're very kind,' says I, ' but don't mention that ; and as to the house, I'll ask Nelly, for she's mistress now and for evermore, and then we can let you know.' Well, we had many a good laugh that night ; and when we come to talk the matter over, it so tickled Nelly's fancy, that she

says, 'Yes, James, by all means let's take the place. We bear no malice now, and it'll be something to talk about, and amuse us, when we think what strange things have happened there ; besides, the Wildbloods will be near, and we may as well be friends.' Now, sir, you have the lot ; and if you'll excuse me a bit, I'll just put on my overcoat, and call Nelly, and then we'll go round with you to Wildblood's."

In the short interval that ensued, we could not help thinking that all this explanation seemed very satisfactory. As far as we could discern, there was not a shadow of an aspersion of any sort, that could be fairly breathed against any of our characters. And when we considered the bitter and protracted misery of Nelly, and the temporary affliction of the Wildbloods, which, by the way, might have ended so disastrously, and realised, at the same time, that there was no *real* blame attachable to anybody, it seemed curious indeed. We think we are exceptionally fortunate, to be the biographers of such a bevy of righteous people.

"I dare say, sir, as genteel folks would think it very queer, for a fellow to be on good terms with a

man as had married his wife while he was away, and then pitched her overboard for another," said Wilkinson, when we'd cleared the gates of Spoony-stone Villa ; "and so should I," he continued, "if my own folly hadn't caused it all."

"Well, if you must have our candid opinion," we replied, "we will say it's rather delicate ground to tread upon."

"So it is, sir, and especially for the women ; but the truth is, Nelly feels she's been very hard on Wilfred ; and, I believe, he thinks he's been a little harsh to her ; and I'm pretty certain I've injured the whole of 'em ; and somehow, we've got a notion into our heads as we should now try and do each other as much good as we can ; and every day's friendship seems to wipe out some of the mischief. P'raps I've got my fine feelin's blunted with bush life ; but there it is, and I mean now to make everybody as happy as I can."

"And a very noble resolution, too," we said ; "for beyond a little indiscretion, it would rather puzzle us to see how any of you could have acted differently, under the circumstances ; and if you can manage, after all, to make up a happy family,

why, we suppose, that's more your concern than anybody else's."

"But there's just one little sin I will plead guilty to," broke in Nelly, "though I was in such poverty that I scarcely knew what to do for the best. And yet I shall never forgive myself for it, and it is the only thing which now reproaches me. When Wilfred proposed to me, I imagined my husband had been dead for some years, and I was foolish enough to conceal the fact of my previous marriage. People who have never known the pangs of want would, no doubt, condemn me for this, but I was in such distress that I yielded to the temptation, and I think I have had my full measure of punishment. Not the least part of it has been the thought that I afterwards prosecuted the man I had deceived, and made him and his legal wife unhappy; but I never dreamt of a day like this coming. It's the thought of having unwittingly done them so much injury that reconciles me to the acquaintance which, otherwise, I should have shunned. I can now, at all events, show that I am desirous of making reparation, and my long-lost husband, here, is no niggard in giving

me the means of rendering them many kindnesses."

"All right, Nelly," said the husband, good-naturedly, "but I don't want any of your soft soap. You know all the time as it was my fault as things turned out as they did, so let's now talk about something else."

"You see that big shop yonder, sir," he said, "that's Wildblood's, and a rare thriving trade he does there, I can tell you. Besides that, he still travels a bit for Coffey and Cracker, but he'll have to give it up. He's played a rare game with the people as turned him off. They used to serve lots of people about here, and the shop he's now in was a very good customer one time."

"And an extensive place it is," we said, as we approached the premises. "He seems to go in for two trades; one in each window."

"Yes, sir, they was two shops once, but he had 'em thrown into one, an' he tells me the ham and cheese line pays him better than the grocery."

"He's evidently an enterprising fellow, and he isn't much behind the age in puffing," we said, when

we were close enough to read the great posters in the windows.

"No, sir, he's not ; but I put him up to a good deal of that," rejoined Wilkinson, with much pride. "You can cram the public with anything, so as you make the type big enough."

"But it's scarcely fair to the public," we urged, in a tone of gentle admonition.

"P'raps not," he said, "but the public is partly to blame for it. As long as people expect to get their goods under cost price, it would be ruin for a tradesman to tell them it was impossible. So the best plan is to make them believe they are getting them on such terms, and, at the same time, stick a good profit to the transactions."

"Very ingenious, no doubt," said we, as we entered the crowded shop, and found Wilfred up to his eyes in business.

Of course he was delighted to see us, and leaving his men to attend to the customers, he led the way upstairs, where we found Catherine and old Mrs. Gribble looking the picture of happiness.

It was a curious spectacle to see Nelly go up and kiss the second wife, as if they had never

been brought in antagonism to each other in their lives.

"Christmas eve's a busy night," said Wilkinson, addressing his wife's second husband, "so never mind us, and go down to the shop."

"Nay, I can spare a few moments," replied Wilfred, "and, if you gentlemen have no objection, we'll drink to a merry Christmas and many of them. We're all here now, and I hope it's not our last meeting. You see, sir," he said, "since they made us grocers wine merchants, we can manage a bottle of champagne now and then."

"This gentleman knows all about our history," interposed Wilkinson, with a hearty laugh, "and so I thought the best thing was to come round with him, and show him how nicely everything was arranged."

"Well, sir, the fact is," said Wilfred, tersely, "last year we thought we were all wrong, and this year we find we're all right."

"And we are truly delighted to hear it," said we; "may you long continue so."

"Oh, that's only a dry toast," said Wilfred, smiling. "If you'll excuse me, I'll bring some-

thing up to wet it with," and he was out of the room before we could reply.

"Is that a baby?" said we, glancing at the blushing Catherine, and feeling the bashful twinges of single blessedness.

"Yes, and a strapping fine lad too," cried the less bashful Wilkinson. "I mean to make him my heir, if I've none of my own."

Catherine only continued to blush, and Nelly exchanged smiles with her; but the old woman giggled away until her wrinkles looked like facial waves under a heavy ground swell.

"And pray how old is he?" we continued, gaining courage as we went along.

"Over seven months," answered Kitty, while a deep tint of the old peach-bloom mantled on her cheeks.

"Then it's got all it's teeth?" we said, for want of something better to say, but in total ignorance of the mysteries of infantile dentition.

"You are in a hurry," roared the old woman, in evident contempt at our want of experience.

"Well, we meant to ask if it had been vaccinated?" we said, feeling that we had somehow or other made a mess of it.

"Oh, yes, three months ago," replied Catherine, with a titter, which seemed to indicate a conviction that we were talking a great deal of rubbish.

Thinking, therefore, we had miserably failed in the baby conversation, we were about to address a remark to Wilkinson, when Wilfred bounced into the room with a couple of bottles of champagne under his arms.

"Who do you think's downstairs?" he said.

"I don't know," replied Kitty.

"Why Jane and her husband. They're come for their Christmas fare."

"Oh, do have them up," said Nelly. "We can well afford to laugh at our past misfortunes now."

"That's the servant you had at Spoonystone Villa?" said we, remembering her name.

"Yes, the identical woman who was in the thick of the fight," replied Wilfred, casting a mischievous glance at Catherine. "If you don't mind, sir, I'll go and bring them up. It'll add a completeness to our toast."

"Certainly not," we said. "It's an unexpected pleasure to have all the actors in this curious drama suddenly brought together."

"And a very funny drama it is," exclaimed Wilfred, as he tripped again out of the room.

"And like all other plays I've ever seen, it seems to have turned out well for everybody," joined in Wilkinson.

"How long has Jane been married?" we next inquired.

"Oh, more than six months," said Catherine. "She married from our place."

"Here they are!" merrily shouted Wilfred, as he pushed open the door, and the couple entered the room. "Be quick then, and let's open these bottles and drink to the everlasting prosperity of everybody."

Perhaps it is needless to add that the toast was drunk with enthusiasm, and crowned with all the honours.

So, now, Mr. Stage Manager, we think the time has arrived when you may group our characters for a final tableau.

Suppose you place old Mrs. Gribble in the centre, and let her hold in her arms that charming little baby. She will, of course, smile on it as a grandmother naturally would, who is proud of the first-born addition to a second generation.

Then the next figures will be Wilfred and Catherine, who can stand on either side, clasping each other's hands, and glancing at the Wildblood of the future with parental affection, mingled, probably, with a look of filial duty towards the emblem of the now rapidly fading past.

On the right you can put Mr. and Mrs. Wilkinson, who are, of course, gazing at each other with the love which long absence is known to rekindle. And if they choose to associate with it a passing sigh for the absence of another object on which to shower their mutual devotion, there can be no objection to their doing so.

On the left you will put the humble, but not less happy, Jane and her husband; but, being working people, we shall only advise them to assume a prayerful attitude for daily bread. The mouths will come fast enough, for, as we have already hinted, nature never forsakes the artisan.

And now they are all arranged, do you think we could well let the curtain of imagination descend on a pleasanter spectacle?

At all events, we will assume we could *not*, and in the meantime betake ourselves to the

Peckham Station, and as the train wends its way to Ludgate, we will have time to contemplate this happy dénouement. How can we do so in a better place, than where the story first opened ; for was it not in the shady seclusion of a railway carriage that Wilfred and Catherine first met ?

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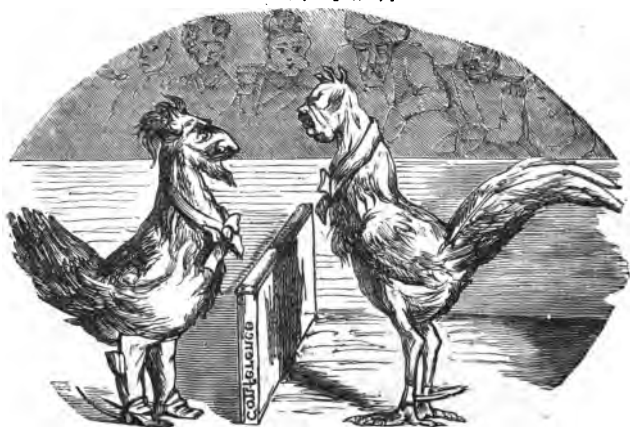
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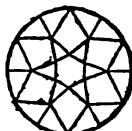
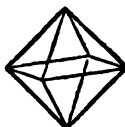
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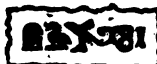
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The TWO UPON THE, in
the Dictionary, p. 264.



Egyptian Hieroglyphic carb,
to be drunk, showing the ampu-
tation of a man's leg. See
under BREAK LEE (viz.
Strong Drink) in the Dictio-
nary, p. 61.

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